

THE SPIRIT IN, UNDER, AND THROUGH:
EXPERIENCING THE HOLY SPIRIT IN
LAY COMMUNION VISITS

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ABSTRACT

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This project was conducted at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Hickory, North Carolina. Lay Communion visitors lacked awareness of the Spirit's work when making visits. If lay Communion visitors participate in a symposium about the spiritual significance of Communion, they position themselves to better experience the Spirit work during visits. The project's duration was six weeks. The symposium employed experiential learning to convey the significance of Communion. Data collection included one-on-one interviews, pre and post-symposium surveys, journals, researcher observations, and focus-group discussions. Findings demonstrate that understanding Communion's significance enhanced the spiritual experience of participants.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have learned that no one can undertake a work like this one alone. So many have contributed so significantly that I fear my acknowledgment cannot suffice. Ironically, this is why acknowledgments are necessary.

Thank you to my loving wife and best friend, Kim, who constantly supports me in all my endeavors. Thanks go to my two sons, Liam and Nolan, for forming me into the person I am. I am so grateful for all my family, friends, and the great cloud of witnesses who have loved, supported, and prayed for me.

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The congregation I serve, Mt. Olive ELCA in Hickory, NC, has been more supportive, encouraging, and patient with me than I could have ever asked. Thank you to the NC Synod of the ELCA, Christ's Lutheran of Stanley, NC (NALC), Holy Trinity Lutheran of Hickory, NC, and Mom and Dad for additional financial support.

Finally, I thank God in Jesus Christ for loving, creating, forgiving, redeeming, and including me – and then doing it all again tomorrow.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to everyone who takes the risk of ministering.
It is a task full of fear and trembling, but the rewards are abundant and eternal.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CPE	Clinical Pastoral Education
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
UCLA	University of California in Los Angeles
USPS	United States Postal Service

INTRODUCTION

Through the synergy and four foundational chapters, I present several ministry issues this project will address. The central issue is that the laity often miss out on opportunities to experience the Holy Spirit when they fail to comprehend the spiritual significance of the ministry they do.

When pastors manage to share ministry with the laity, it often leaves the laity feeling frustrated, exhausted, and discouraged. These adverse outcomes occur when pastors assign tasks to the laity that do not match their gifts, they lack adequate training, and they fail to see the significance of the ministry they do. However, when pastors train and inspire the laity with the knowledge of their ministry's significance, they better position them to experience the Holy Spirit work in and through them when they minister.

Instead of feeling frustrated, exhausted, and discouraged, lay people who know the spiritual significance of their ministry and experience the Spirit's work grow in faith and undergo life transformation. I designed my project to enact this favorable scenario in the church. I hypothesized that if lay Communion visitors participate in an educational symposium on the significance of Holy Communion, they will better position themselves to experience the Holy Spirit moving in and through them as they perform their ministry. The research undertaken for this project includes Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Interdisciplinary intersections with this hypothesis.

Biblical Foundation

The Biblical foundation from Luke 10:1-20 is a case study of Jesus addressing the problem of supply and demand for his ministry, a problem every pastor encounters in their ministry context. While supply and demand are not the central problems of this project, the project's outcome of better positioning the laity to experience the Spirit as they perform their ministry inspires more laity to join the work of ministry.

In Luke's passage, Jesus calls and instructs seventy lay ministers to extend his ministry to places he intended to go. Like lay Communion visitors, the seventy made Jesus and his grace present to those who would never encounter him otherwise. The seventy's ministry success brought Jesus, and the joy only he provides, to many.

Understanding the significance of their ministry in Jesus' name, Jesus better positioned them to experience the Holy Spirit's work in and through them as they ministered. They gained this understanding experientially as they performed the ministry Jesus assigned to them. Luke tells us that the seventy returned to Jesus joyfully, having experienced the Spirit work in them.

The pericope assures readers that ministry performed in Jesus' name is undergirded and empowered by God through the Holy Spirit. In addition, the passage helps develop criteria for assessing participants' experience of the Holy Spirit. For example, when the participants report an experience of joy resulting from their ministry, this passage suggests that joyful ministry experiences may indicate a movement of the Spirit. However, the passage does not claim that joy is the only possible outcome of the Spirit's movement, so the project's research monitored other outcomes.

Historical Foundation

The Pietist movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries set the stage for the most robust empowerment of the laity in the church's history. No other era provides the quantity of information about the laity's spiritual experience of performing ministry. What began as a program to connect faith to daily life for the laity within the Lutheran church inspired some of the church's most influential players and concluded with the formation of several new Christian denominations and a missions effort that reached around the globe. However, the laity's move from private to public ministry during this time was the most far-reaching for the church.

The era of Pietism provides the church with numerous examples of lay persons who experienced the Holy Spirit in new and enhanced ways through participation in ministry. However, unlike the seventy sent out by Jesus, not all Pietist lay ministers experienced the Holy Spirit as joy. Instead, their ministry was often difficult and discouraging. Nevertheless, many Pietist lay ministers persevered and experienced the Holy Spirit in ways that drew them closer to God. A theme that emerged in the research was that of lay ministers continuing their ministry pursuits until their deaths.

This project utilizes the Pietist movement as its historical foundation to provide a successful and effective precedent for equipping, empowering, and inspiring the laity for ministry, which results in the growth of their faith. Additionally, the examples of Pietist lay ministers inform the criteria for assessing the Spirit's work. For example, if lay Communion visitors indicate a willingness to continue serving in that way for the foreseeable future, that may suggest a movement of the Spirit in them.

Theological Foundation

Eucharistic Pneumatology, the study of how the Spirit works in Holy Communion, is vital for this project. Christians cannot stamp anything they want with the imprimatur of the Holy Spirit. To develop a series of legitimate claims about the Holy Spirit's work in the Eucharist, the research required appealing to several authoritative resources. The Lutheran context of the project greatly influenced the choice of authoritative resources, which are the Bible, the three creeds of the Western Church, Martin Luther's writings, the Lutheran Confessions, and my spiritual discernment by virtue of my ordination. All sources of authority were tested against the others. In addition, the contextual research was tested and challenged by a spectrum of differing theological perspectives from representatives of multiple Christian denominations.

Project participants learned the Lutheran theological understanding of Holy Communion. They read Luther's explanations of the sacrament and heard about its controversial issues during the Reformation. Eucharistic Pneumatology provided a rich treasury of criteria for assessing the Spirit's work in the participants. For example, the Bible attests that the Holy Spirit, in the context of Holy Communion, forgives sins, brings the Kingdom, creates and renews faith, gives eternal life, and binds all Christians together - both living and dead. The Confessions add comforting, gifting, protecting, and enabling obedience to God as criteria by which one may assess the work of the Spirit in Communion. Based on the theological foundation of this project, all these outcomes are possible experiences that one can attribute to the movement of the Spirit in the project participants.

Interdisciplinary Foundation

The Interdisciplinary concept for the project is the principle of immediacy, the orientation one adopts when verbally or nonverbally communicating care and concern. Using immediacy while communicating produces greater positive outcomes. Therefore, enabling participants to utilize immediacy in their Communion visits produces greater positive experiences.

Connections between Communion visits and immediacy are ubiquitous. For example, lay Communion visitors communicate Care and concern on many levels. They convey care from God, the congregation, and themselves, and they do so verbally and nonverbally. Verbally, lay Communion visitors adopt immediacy when proclaiming the Words of Institution to the sick or shut-in communicant. Nonverbally, they adopt immediacy by distributing the consecrated elements.

The project participants learned the best practices of immediacy for Communion visits so that sick and shut-in members experienced the many layers of care and concern they convey. As most immediacy occurs through nonverbal means, project participants learned to maximize their physical appearance, gestures, facial expressions, vocal behavior, touch, and use of time and space during the visit.

Conclusion

The four foundational chapters of this project intersect my hypothesis in fundamental ways. First, the Biblical Foundation shows how Jesus provided a transformative spiritual experience through encouraging, equipping, and empowering the

laity for ministry in his name. Second, the Historical Foundation provides numerous examples of lay people, like the project participants, whose experience of the Holy Spirit through ministry grew their faith and transformed their lives. Third, the Theological Foundation helps establish legitimate criteria for assessing the experience of the project participants to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in and through them. Finally, the Interdisciplinary Foundation informs the best practices for Communion visits so that communicants' experience of Communion aligns with what God is doing in them, thus setting the stage for lay Communion visitors to have a positive ministry experience. I am confident that the research performed for the foundational chapters improved the outcomes of the six-week project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

Mt. Olive must equip, empower, and encourage lay ministry inside and outside the congregation. To do so, the laity must experience the transformative movement of the Holy Spirit in and through them as they perform their ministry. Observing how the congregation has invested its resources historically and the ways it does today, its passion for serving its neighbors is apparent. Despite this, glaring ministry opportunities are being neglected, even in its backyard. A new apartment building with 300 residents is adjacent to the church campus. The local middle school with 600 students is only one block east. There are needs at both locations, yet neither of these “mission fields” has been explored by Mt. Olive. The seeming inability to do so frustrates the desire to help and serve.

In addition to the congregation’s need for outreach to its neighborhood, there are abundant opportunities for “inreach” toward its membership, especially among its oldest and youngest members. With a growing list of shut-ins who need ongoing pastoral care and children and teen ministries without congregational leadership, paid staff cannot provide adequate attention to these areas. Jesus told his disciples, “The harvest is

plentiful, but the laborers are few.”¹ For Mt. Olive to be an effective Christian movement that meets both the needs of its members as well as those of its neighbors, more of its members must respond to God’s call described in our congregation’s baptismal liturgy: “learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.”² However, lay ministry is not only for the benefit of ministry recipients.

The members’ response to this call to ministry is as much for the fortification of their faith as for those they will serve. When we experience God working through us, God draws us closer so that we learn to discern his work and wisdom better and grow in our faith. Author and pastor Henry Blackaby says in his bestselling study, *Experiencing God*, “When you experience God working in you and through you, you come to know him more fully.”³ In Luke’s Gospel, the evangelist gives an account of Jesus sending out seventy followers to minister. Luke tells us they were not only effective in their service, but they also returned with joy. (Luke 10:17). Sharing pastoral care ministry, specifically Communion visitation, with our laity in a way that builds both competence and confidence while producing a transformative experience of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who serve is the goal of this project.

¹ Matthew 9:37, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSVUE.

² Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 228.

³ Henry Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 260.

Context

Mt. Olive is a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in Hickory, North Carolina. Mt. Olive is traditional and liturgical, with an average of 150 weekly worship attendance, pre-pandemic. At this point, we have yet to break 120 in-person attendance on a Sunday morning. However, there is a considerable number participating virtually in our faith community. Fifty years ago, the church was on its way to becoming the largest of its denomination in the area, which was itself heavily Lutheran. The once-large congregation has been in decline for over forty years.

Nevertheless, it is beginning to find its identity and giftedness in its outreach rather than its program offerings and the number of members. With its location on a busy north-south artery through town, the congregation often undertakes ministry with the surrounding community in mind. Blessed with financial resources, the congregation is pastor-centered and has grown accustomed to a multi-staff environment. The average membership age is also significant for this congregation, with forty-plus members over eighty. Though the congregation has dedicated considerable resources and energies to increasing the younger demographic for the past fifteen years, the quantitative results have been disappointing. Nevertheless, despite its dwindling membership, Mt. Olive still plays a vital role in supporting its synod and denomination. It makes a difference in its community, albeit via largely hands-off means.

No one knows why the founding members chose the name Mt. Olive, perhaps at the suggestion of the founding pastor and local physician, Dr. D. C. Huffman. In his life sketch, the author wrote: “In his medical practice, he was one of the best friends the poorer people, white or black, had, his charges being moderate, often to a fault, and he

also did much real charity practice.”⁴ Whether Dr. Huffman deserves the credit is questionable. Nevertheless, Mt. Olive shares his priorities of generosity and care for today's poor and marginalized.

In the first fifty years of its existence, with it being a small, rural congregation at the time, Mt. Olive could not compensate a full-time minister. Therefore, the congregation shared the pastor with several others, and their duties were only essential ministry functions such as preaching, administering sacraments, marrying, and burying. Though records are lacking, lay ministry must have happened during that time. Otherwise, the church could not meet its ministry needs sufficiently. The records indicate that recognized lay ministry did not begin until they called the first full-time pastor in 1935.⁵ At that point, Mt. Olive formed the Women's Missionary Society, also in charge of the “Light Brigade,” the ministry for children and youth. Like many congregations, Mt. Olive grew along with its surrounding community throughout the late 1940s, the 1950s, the 1960s, and the 1970s. Its facilities were built during this era to accommodate many people, with the sanctuary seating nearly 500. Mt. Olive added additional staff as programs expanded for all ages.

Professionalism crept into pastoral ministry churchwide in the mid-twentieth century, and congregational expectations were for pastors to fulfill all clerical tasks.⁶ The

⁴ North Carolina Synod of the Lutheran Church in America, *Life Sketches of Lutheran Ministers: North Carolina and Tennessee Synods 1773-1965* (Columbia, SC: The State Printing Company, 1966), 115.

⁵ Nancy Arndt, *One Hundred Twenty Five Years History of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church 1885-2010* (Newton, NC: Wallace Printing, Inc., 2010), 8.

⁶ Chris Ponniah, “The Pursuit of Professionalism: a Bane or a Blessing?,” *Academia.edu*, accessed December 7, 2021, https://www.academia.edu/9598938/The_Pursuit_of_Professionalism_a_bane_or_a_blessing?pop_sutd=false.

widespread consequence of unilateral leadership styles is that lay leaders' involvement becomes inhibited and sets the tone for lay ministry, or lack thereof, for the future. Like so many congregations, Mt. Olive's ministry leadership did not increase to scale with the membership during its era of most significant growth.

Nonetheless, the church, which stretched its leadership to its limits, continued to offer a full assortment of programs for all ages and fully utilized its facilities throughout the week. This vitality indicates the incredible amount of time, energy, and dedication the pastor and other church staff gave the ministry. What was lacking was meaningful opportunities for the laity to be encouraged, equipped, and empowered for ministry, which would benefit their faith in addition to serving others.

Exacerbating the problem, this period of outward growth became a nostalgic golden era to which the church would compare any future success. In many minds, the strongest the church had ever been was when trained professional clergy did it all. However, over the next twenty years, as culture shifted so that worship attendance was no longer a societal expectation and the rising generation shared little of the congregational loyalty felt by their parents, membership plateaued. Those who left or stopped participating were generally of a younger demographic. At the same time, the older members remained loyal and even increased their support of the congregation in many cases.

Meanwhile, to create even more challenges, the population of Hickory ground to a near halt. Children of the congregation went away to college and afterward moved to larger cities to find jobs. Even with capable and dedicated church staff putting in overtime hours, the cultural tide was such that numerical growth was a near impossibility.

Nevertheless, the expectation of growth remained. One can surmise that unrealistic expectations gradually wearied and disheartened the ministry staff, and records show that during one year, three transitioned out. With such upheaval, the plateaued congregation gave way to rapid decline. The situation begs the question: what would have happened if the staff had shared their ministry burden by encouraging, equipping, and empowering the laity to perform ministry that had the power to transform and fortify the laity's faith? What if the body of Christ at Mt. Olive had enacted the words of Christ: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)? The thesis of this project is that had the laity been encouraged, equipped, inspired, and empowered for ministry, they would have touched more lives and grown in faith.

The problem at Mt. Olive is neither laziness nor apathy. A significant percentage of the congregation freely gives hours each week to help with crucial aspects of ministry. Some members are virtually unpaid staff. The problem is the covert hierarchy of types of ministry work. The congregation members believe that some work is only for professional ministers and that only the theologically trained are qualified. Admittedly, there are deep theological roots to this engrained belief. In our denomination, for good order, only pastors administer the two sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. However, that is where the delineation ends. The laity is encouraged to lead prayer, teach Bible studies, preach when necessary, visit the sick and lonely, offer pastoral care, and proclaim the gospel in word and deed inside and outside the congregation.

Ministry opportunities outside the congregation abound. The city of Hickory, the location of Mt. Olive's facilities, is small, with a plateaued population of 43,000.⁷ The population growth slowed at the turn of the twenty-first century with the loss of factory jobs in the area. Once known for its furniture and textile industry, the city has been rediscovering itself for the past two decades.

Hickory, the largest city in a four-county radius, is a hub for shopping and dining. As the home to numerous social service agencies, homeless individuals and families flock to the city to receive aid. Homeless shelters, soup kitchens, food pantries, free clinics, and addiction programs highlight the city's generosity. Unfortunately, in 2017, Hickory was listed by *The Pulse* as the fifth worst city in the United States regarding opioid abuse.⁸ Many believe the addiction and homelessness problem is a direct result of unemployment and underemployment following the decline of the area's factory jobs.

Despite overwhelming challenges, Hickory residents have not given up hope for a brighter future. Under construction is a ninety-one-million-dollar infrastructure project to revitalize Hickory by creating at least 8,000 new jobs, adding 1,750 new housing units, spurring 500 million dollars in investment, and growing the population by 3,500 by 2035⁹. As the city holds out hope for the future, so does Mt. Olive. There is one demographic

⁷ United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts Hickory city, North Carolina," *Census.gov*, accessed November 3, 2021, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hickorycitynorthcarolina>.

⁸ Joe Killian, "NC is home to the #1 worst city for opioid abuse – and four in the top 20," *NCpolicywatch.org*, accessed November 10, 2021, <https://pulse.ncpolicywatch.org/2017/07/07/nc-home-1-worst-city-opioid-abuse-four-top-20/#sthash.00LK17Nl.dpbs>.

⁹ Kevin Griffin, "Hickory Trail: A Look at the Five Walkways that Will Reshape Hickory," *Hickoryrecord.com*, accessed November 10, 2021, https://hickoryrecord.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/hickory-trail-a-look-at-the-five-walkways-that-will-reshape-hickory/article_b969e966-eeb6-11ea-82c7-bf8f1b068b26.html.

that has grown in the area: retirees. As Hickory increasingly becomes a retirement destination, most new congregation members of Mt. Olive are retired.

Mt. Olive's campus is nearly an entire city block in the northern commercial area of the city. Grocery stores, restaurants, pharmacies, and small businesses are nearby, and developers built a new 1000-unit luxury apartment complex adjacent to the property. One block east is the city's middle school, where more than half the students receive free or reduced lunches due to their families' low incomes. Owing to their great need, the school lists many volunteer opportunities on its website.

Only thirty-seven percent of residents in a one-mile radius of the church facility are active in a congregation. However, forty-one percent strongly believe, and twenty-five percent somewhat agree that "God is love and invites the world into a loving relationship." That is an incredibly positive perception of who God is. Regarding life concerns for the area, the two most significant concerns are "Financing the future" and "Day-to-day financial matters." Over half of the residents access Facebook, Mt. Olive's primary social media outlet, daily. Seventy percent of Mt. Olive's neighbors believe tolerance is a virtue one should pursue, and sixty-two percent believe people should be better stewards of the environment. These are issues the church can support. Mt. Olive is hopeful for the future but needs strong leadership and significant transformation to remain vital in our rapidly changing world.

Though outreach is vital to the ministry of Mt. Olive, inreach still receives more resources and energy. There is safety and comfort in ministering to the needs of those with whom one is familiar. Small groups comprise most congregational ministries outside of Sunday morning worship. The quilting ministry, Tying and Tacking Girls, is virtually

a factory churning over 200 quilts annually. The group gives most of the quilts to Lutheran World Relief, which distributes them across the globe. The group provides a smaller percentage of quilts to local ministries. Though outreach, the quilters remain hands-off with those they serve and build few relationships outside the group.

Women of the congregation also coordinate WELCA (Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America) meetings, including circle meetings and service projects. Over a dozen men come together every Tuesday morning for Bible study and breakfast. These men sing together to begin each session and occasionally visit care facilities to sing for the residents. Adult Fellowship is the name of the seniors' group, which meets monthly and performs one service project per year, which is a drive to provide items for adult men with mental disabilities. There is no denying the importance of this work, but if attention is given to helping the laity understand the significance of these ministries, it would better position them to experience the Holy Spirit as they perform the ministries.

Mt. Olive's outreach tends to take the form of giving to those less fortunate. For example, Catawba County offers a backpack program to feed school-age children and families. Still, it has not developed a way to provide food during school breaks. Micah's Cupboard is a ministry Mt. Olive created to do just that. The ministry collects primarily non-perishable food and distributes it at Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. It also gives fresh food, including milk, apples, and hams. Once per year, Micah's cupboard offers a free spaghetti meal with a clothing closet to distribute warm clothing for the colder months. The only interaction with the community beyond the spaghetti meal is with counselors from the schools with whom the ministry works.

The congregation sponsors two large community outreaches each year, an Easter egg hunt and a Halloween Trunk or Treat. Both events include meals, and the church rents a mini train so families can ride around the half-mile track behind the church facilities. These events are hands-on, and hundreds of families take advantage of them as they are free and family-oriented, though very few have ever become involved in Mt. Olive's other ministries.

Our outreach team also hosts bloodmobiles thrice yearly in our fellowship hall. Members donate to a "Little Free Pantry" and "Little Free Library" on the church campus. Annually, at least fifteen percent of giving to Mt. Olive goes to ministry beyond its walls. The current ministries highlight the members' generosity and genuine concern for those beyond the church walls, but attention is not given to helping the membership understand the significance of these ministries. If the membership understood precisely how their work and generosity are bringing the presence of Jesus into the lives of their needy and hurting neighbors and how Jesus' presence is making a difference in their neighbors' lives, they would be positioned to better experience the Holy Spirit in what they are doing.

Mt. Olive's strengths are its superb facilities, abundant financial resources, and loyal and generous membership. Its potential liabilities are the age of membership, resistance to change, hands-off orientation, and dependence upon staff to be the doers of ministry. Utilizing the congregation's strengths and minimizing its liabilities would prove effective for revitalizing the church.

The apparent mission fields for Mt. Olive are the new apartments adjacent to the church campus, the Title 1 middle school a block away, and the utilization of its facilities to serve the surrounding community. Through these mission fields, there are many

untapped ministry opportunities to which Mt. Olive has the potential to respond.

However, the overall model of Mt. Olive's ministry must change to address these opportunities. The model must change from one in which the pastor and staff do the bulk of ministry to one in which they encourage, equip, empower, and inspire the ministry of the laity. By unleashing and inspiring the laity to minister, there will be a multiplication of ministry, resulting in the growth in faith of those ministering.

Ministry Journey

Throughout my twenty-five-year ministry career, being equipped, empowered, and encouraged for ministry positioned me to experience the Holy Spirit move in ways I would have never experienced otherwise. My journey has been from fear to faith, and I believe the faith of all the laity benefits from being equipped for and inspired to ministry. My ministry journey is the story of how the Holy Spirit has worked in and through me as I grew as a minister and a person of faith.

Ministry never came naturally to me. Though raised within a faithful family who was in attendance and served at all church functions, faith seemed confined to the church building. Our home life was mainly absent of spiritual practices other than the occasional mealtime blessing and solitary bedtime prayers. No one in my family was comfortable leading extemporaneous prayer, so we would sing or recite a memorized blessing on those occasions. Certainly, God hears memorized prayers as well as those made up on the spot, but I processed these second-hand prayers as disconnected from personal faith. Indeed, the Lord's Prayer is the perfect prayer, but in my self-involved youth, it did not feel personal and, therefore, lacked significance.

My parents were also born of a generation and mainline Christian culture that left the articulation of faith to the professionals. While my parents did an excellent job of living out their faith, they did not often discuss it with me. My parents “walked the walk” of faith much more than they “talked the talk” of it. They assumed that needing to talk about one’s faith indicated one’s failure to live it. I owe my ability to pray publicly primarily to my wife, as she encouraged me by insisting on mealtime prayers from the beginning of our relationship. I inherited my parents’ faith, strong but private.

During my teen years, my pastor took a particular interest in me and saw ministry gifts in me that I could not see. He encouraged me toward leadership in the congregation. The church placed leadership opportunities before me as in no other arena of my life. Being a shy and introverted youth, I did not exude leadership characteristics. However, my parents saw that I was present at every church activity, so my presence and availability could hardly be ignored. Mainly for this reason, my congregation asked me to serve on a call committee, appointed me to the church council, and sponsored me as a voting member to our synod’s youth convocation in ninth and tenth grades. At convocation, I was chosen by my peers to serve on the reference and counsel committee of our Synod’s annual assembly to review all submitted resolutions and memorials. Though unprepared for the task, I was honored to be chosen. My congregation encouraged me and supported me in all my endeavors. If every congregation gave every member the same amount of ministry opportunities, encouragement, and support as I received, there would be no shortage of ministers for the church.

By the end of my senior year in high school, the Spirit brought me together with a new group of friends who loved singing gospel music. We would sing for anyone

listening, offering special music at local worship services, revivals, and youth meetings. We even went door-to-door at Christmas singing carols. Before I could talk about my faith, I could sing about it. I grew so close to those friends that we were all in each other's weddings. Having a friend group fortified by faith and a common desire to share the gospel was spiritually formative. Singing with them was the first time I experienced public ministry. As scared as I was, performing this music ministry gave me a glimpse of what it is like to bring the message of Jesus to others. Just that tiny glimpse of the significance of this ministry positioned me to experience the Holy Spirit as never before.

After college, I discerned that I was called to ministry and had gifts for working with youth. In my first full-time youth ministry position, God blessed me with active youth volunteers who supported and guided me as I learned the ropes of youth ministry. They taught me many things, including the importance of relationships and servanthood. Having supporters like this enabled me to achieve beyond what I would have done alone. I was learning more about the significance of youth ministry, and as a result, the ministry grew in numbers and vitality, and my faith grew. Experiencing the work of ministry taught me its significance, which positioned me to better experience the Holy Spirit in what I did.

I experienced one glimpse of the youth ministry's significance by observing one young man who often drove through the church parking lot. His parents were divorced; his family kept moving from one place to another, and the church became his place of stability. I watched him, through my office window, drive through the church parking lot nearly every day, needing to touch down on the one place in his life that was stable and unmoving. He was seeking security and permanence from the church. Over the years, I

have learned that this desire for permanence is a major reason some folks react so poorly to change in the church. Understanding the significance of why people resist change has opened space for the Spirit to empower me with compassion and patience for them.

Another glimpse of the significance of youth ministry came from the house next door to the church. In it lived a young lady who came to every youth event and always seemed excited about whatever our ministry offered. I began calling her our MVP, and she seemed to like it. One day, I received an email from her. Her email address was “MVPinHTY...” - Most Valuable Person in Holy Trinity Youth. I found it so moving that in the phase of her life when she was searching so hard for identity, she found it in that title as a valuable member of our faith community. Years later, she emailed me that our youth ministry saved her life. She had begun cutting herself, had an eating disorder, and was feeling worthless in other arenas of her life. Still, she was the most valuable person in that youth group setting. That is what baptism provides to all of us: an identity of being God’s favorite. Knowing her story taught me the significance of baptismal identity, which shapes my relationship with God and profoundly influences my interpretation of Jesus’ gospel. Experiencing the significance of that ministry positioned me for spiritual transformation.

The final glimpse of youth ministry significance I will mention came as a result of a hospital visit I made to pray with a family before a young man’s heart surgery. I was incredibly nervous about visiting a hospital. As the surgeon went into graphic detail about the procedure he would be performing, I passed out. I was utterly humiliated. The older teenage sister of the young man witnessed my humiliation. She would often tease me about it afterward. One day, however, she said, “You know I could have never gotten

through that day had you not been there.” Despite my weakness, God had been at work through me. Being present in Jesus's name brought great comfort to this young lady. God works through us and frequently despite us. Learning the significance of the ministry God was calling me to do positioned me to experience the Spirit who encourages me to act even when afraid and to have confidence in God’s work regardless of my strength or abilities.

While serving in full-time ministry, I began learning more about the significance of my Lutheran faith heritage. Grace is central, as I learned from Luther’s words: “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith.”¹⁰ Things I had never appreciated about my denomination as a child, such as its liturgy, began to make sense to me, and I began to appreciate the significance of these things. Learning the significance of Lutheran theology and tradition positioned me to experience the movement of the Holy Spirit in traditional expressions such as liturgical worship and especially in the sacraments.

In order to set the stage for ministers to experience the Spirit, ministers need an environment of support and grace. I was discouraged in my first youth ministry position because I was terribly underpaid despite the ministry's vibrancy and growth. When I presented this problem to the church council, they took no action. Not only did I feel unsupported, but I was not earning enough to support myself and my growing family.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994), 29.

Paid and volunteer ministers need support and to grow. Therefore, before settling on my next congregation, I ensured that the compensation was sufficient and that I would be supported in other ways. Support is not just about money. I remember asking a call committee what they would do if I did not meet their expectations in three months. They surprised me with their answer, “We will figure out how we can support you so that you can meet expectations.” That statement convinced me that this would be the next congregation I would serve. Knowing that expectations come with grace and support provides a safety net for learning and growing.

My new supervising pastor was also incredibly supportive of me and gave me plenty of freedom to try different things and explore new areas of church leadership. He embodied grace in his authority for the eight years we worked together. For example, my wife’s second pregnancy was physically challenging for her. She had to go on bed rest for several weeks to control her blood pressure. When I could not keep office hours because I needed to be home caring for her, my senior pastor permitted me to stay home and do what I needed for my family. Not only did that make me feel supported, but it indicated that my supervisor trusted me. Trust emboldens a person for ministry, conveying that someone believes in them.

The ELCA commissioned me as a rostered leader within two years of serving this congregation. At that point, I requested that the senior pastor allow me to preach quarterly. That was important for me because I was terrified of public speaking. So fearful was I that once in college, I had taken a zero on a speech assignment rather than facing my fear and doing it. That I found the courage to try a new form of ministry beyond my comfort zone speaks volumes of the grace, appreciation, support, and trust I

received in that context. Empowering and equipping folks for ministry always includes these essentials: support, grace, and trust, to position them to experience the Spirit in their ministry.

Being allowed to move slowly and safely into new areas of church leadership is one of the ways the Spirit led me to pursue ordination. The more confident I became in leading diverse ministries, the more I felt I might be able to serve as a pastor. I assumed being a pastor required more strength and talent than I had to offer, so it was out of the question. My senior pastor was a fantastic pastor of a large and vital congregation. Like me, he was not outgoing or charismatic. His most potent gifts were qualities most people have to offer: authenticity, availability, and humility. Experiencing the power of those common gifts, I began thinking I might be enough to be a pastor.

When Jesus raised leaders for his church, he formed a team that learned together. It is no wonder seminary formation is collaborative. Even with outstanding seminary professors, I learned just as much from being challenged and supported by my seminary colleagues. The friendship and support of my colleagues helped me through the most challenging academic hurdles. I am confident I would not have passed Biblical Hebrew without the study guides my friends devised for weekly vocabulary quizzes. Going through the program with other students with years of full-time ministry experience was also a great benefit. After classes and homework, we would meet in the dorm hallway, have a drink, and talk. In addition to bonding with these folks, I heard stories of how they had managed complex ministry crises. Hearing those stories helped me believe I could handle challenging situations as they had.

The entire process of theological formation relies heavily on the learning community. Clinical Pastoral Education was something I had been dreading because my anxiety is easily set off by many of the sights, sounds, and smells one encounters in a hospital. However, it was a wonderful experience that gave me the courage to visit sick and shut-in people. I was the only white male in my CPE colleague group and significantly younger than the four veteran pastors with me. They were so kind and welcoming that I felt at home with them. They helped me normalize my fears as I discovered they were also afraid in certain hospital situations. In one instance, a colleague asked me to join them on a visit to boost their courage. Although I could not have learned and grown in the same ways alone, being a part of a team enabled me to do so.

I was at a small rural congregation during my internship, which led to my first call as a pastor. I missed team ministry with a large staff but learned that a smaller context had advantages. If a person or family was absent from worship, they were missed and checked on. When we had guests, the members noticed and welcomed them, frequently inviting them to lunch. The congregation functioned in many ways as a family. Having been shy and introverted my entire life, they taught me the art of small talk, which is no small gift to have in one's ministry toolbox. This interpersonal skill development was an enormous growth area for me as, just a few years prior, I would need to do breathing exercises to manage the anxiety of entering a room full of people. I made mistakes, and no one minded; they reveled in being able to tease me about them. I felt so safe in that context that I began preaching without a manuscript. They forgave me if I lost my place or stammered around some. The congregation's expectation was not excellence in all

things; instead, it was availability and authenticity. These gifts genuinely matter in ministry and are not relegated to professionals.

I have served my current call, Mt. Olive, for almost seven years and have spent much time raising church leaders. The youth minister I inherited was in the process of becoming ordained as a pastor, which she is now. In the time we worked together, I was able to give her leadership opportunities to prepare her for her upcoming pastoral ministry. One of our new members received the Spirit's call to ministry. He has completed his internship with two small congregations and indefinitely serves as their Synodically Authorized Minister. Though not his official internship supervisor, I made myself available to advise and resource him when needed. Two years ago, as we managed ministry during the pandemic, Mt. Olive supported a full-time pastoral intern awaiting ordination and her first call. I was her internship supervisor and worked closely with her to provide a rich pastoral foundation upon which she will build. She now serves two Lutheran-sponsored retirement homes as their chaplain. God placed these mentoring opportunities before me, shaping me as a leader and person of faith.

I am taking this passion beyond the congregation and into our synod by serving on our candidacy committee. Members of the candidacy committee journey with potential rostered leaders in our synod throughout the ordination process. I am passionate about helping others experience the Holy Spirit working in and through them as they do ministry in the name of Jesus Christ.

Doing ministry has enabled me to experience the Holy Spirit in ways that would otherwise not have been possible. Experiencing God in ministry has challenged and strengthened my faith. It has made me a better person with a more fulfilling life. Ministry

comes with the privilege of witnessing, first-hand, the work of God in and through others. Often, well-meaning laypersons volunteer for ministries because they want to help and fear that no one else is willing. This reason for volunteering, while generous, causes volunteers to experience frustration and burnout. These negative results are more common when the volunteer lacks the passion, training, or giftedness for the particular ministry. This is why training the laity must include instilling confidence and competence while focusing on the spiritual significance of their ministry. Suppose people know the spiritual significance of their ministry. In that case, they better position themselves to experience the Holy Spirit working in and through them.

The Synergy

The topic I explore in my project is lay Communion visitation. The need is evident for Mt. Olive's ministry to continue to be vibrant, and the Holy Spirit has given us the people and the gifts to meet the demand. Throughout my two decades-plus ministry journey, the Holy Spirit worked through those I ministered to and with to grow me as a minister and person of faith. I entered the ministry field apprehensive and unprepared, fearing that I did not have the strength or ability to be an effective minister. However, time after time, God put people in my path to teach, encourage, and challenge me to go deeper in ministry. These people positioned me to experience the significance of what God called me to do. They encouraged and empowered me to do ministry that enabled me to experience God working in and through me in ways that grew my faith and transformed my life. The tools this project developed will do the same for others.

My project was a symposium on the significance of Holy Communion that equipped, empowered, and inspired lay people for Communion visits. I have a passion and gift for teaching. Since the first half of my ministry career was in youth ministry and Christian Education, teaching and mentoring became my default mode of operation in the congregation. I grew accustomed to simplifying concepts and making theology accessible. My eight semesters of teaching at a university shaped me as a preacher, so my sermons take on an informal lecture style. This project utilized my gifts well and reignited my passion for teaching and mentoring. Through this project, the Holy Spirit worked to inspire the laity for Communion visits that enriched their faith as they ministered to others.

Conclusion

The problem Mt. Olive faced was that its lay Communion visitors lacked the full awareness of the Holy Spirit's movement in and through them as they performed Communion visits. However, adequately equipped lay Communion visitors know the significance of Holy Communion and are better positioned to experience the Spirit move in and through them as they perform their ministry. To address this problem, I conducted a six-week project, including a week-long experiential symposium on the significance of Holy Communion for a group of existing and potential lay Communion visitors.

One of the first heresies the church dealt with was Gnosticism, a belief that the knowledge of God produced salvation. Though I imparted knowledge at the symposium, the goal was not primarily intellectual. Instead, the goal of the symposium was to immerse the participants in the experience of Holy Communion in many different ways

so that they would perceive God at work in the sacrament first-hand and, therefore, gain a new understanding of Communion's significance. Surveys, journals, one-on-one interviews, group discussions, and researcher observations are the research methods I used to obtain data on the differences between the spiritual experiences of lay Communion visitors before and after the symposium on Communion's significance.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸ Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹ cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ ¹⁰ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹ ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ ¹² I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

¹³ “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But at the judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?

No, you will be brought down to Hades.

¹⁶ “Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

¹⁷ The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” ¹⁸ He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹ See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:1-20).

Luke’s story of the Sending of the Seventy provides an inspiring example of how Jesus dealt with a supply and demand problem. There was more ministry Jesus wanted to

do than he could do alone. Today's Church has first-hand knowledge of this challenge. To address this problem, Jesus called and empowered seventy followers to extend his ministry to places he intended to go.

Before sending them out, Jesus instructs them on how to carry out his ministry. The story includes a time-lapse and fast-forwards to the point where the Seventy return, with joy, from the ministry Jesus had sent them. In performing their ministry, they understood that Jesus' power, through the Holy Spirit, worked through them to make their work effective. They were vessels through which Jesus healed and announced the Kingdom. Realizing the significance of Jesus' ministry through them, God better positioned them to experience joy through the Holy Spirit. Jesus brilliantly addresses his supply and demand problem while growing the faith of those he called to help him. Today's Church must learn from Jesus how to extend its ministry while spiritually strengthening its ministers.

The problem in the context for this project, Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Hickory, North Carolina, is that lay Communion visitors lack awareness of the Holy Spirit's work as they perform their ministry. However, when the lay Communion visitors participate in an educational symposium about the spiritual significance of Holy Communion, they are better positioned to experience the Holy Spirit move as they administer Communion to the church's sick and shut-in members. This bible text supports this hypothesis by illuminating how early followers of Jesus, having come to understand the significance of the ministry Jesus called them to, experienced the Holy Spirit at work in and through them as they performed the ministry. Similarly, God positions Mt. Olive's lay

Communion visitors to better experience the Holy Spirit in their ministry when they understand the significance of their ministry.

With approximately twenty shut-in members and an aging population, there exist bountiful opportunities for clergy to share Communion visits with lay Communion visitors at Mt. Olive. However, the congregation members lack confidence and motivation for this ministry without adequate encouragement, equipment, and encouragement. When members are given effective strategies for Communion visits and learn the spiritual significance of this ministry, their confidence and joy for Communion visits and other forms of ministry will grow, along with their faith, as a result of experiencing the Holy Spirit working through them.

This chapter begins with a general overview of the biblical text. Following the overview is an exegesis that explores the biblical text's historical, literary, and canonical contexts. Then, a formal analysis of the text is provided, and a detailed analysis is broken down into smaller sections. Finally, a synthesis is developed between the text's themes and this project's working hypothesis using research performed on the text. A brief reflection concludes this foundational chapter.

Overview of the Text

The chosen Bible text to develop the Biblical Foundation for this project is Luke 10:1-20, sometimes called The Sending of the Seventy¹. This text occurs immediately following the turning point in Luke's Gospel when Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem."

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter Thomas O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, 11 (Leicester, United Kingdom: Apollos, 2001), 120.

(Luke 9:51). There, he will be arrested, crucified, and killed. Before this point, Jesus had been preaching, teaching, and performing miracles in the area around his hometown known as Galilee. A shift in tone has begun as Jesus enters a more treacherous mission field. This text is unique. While one can compare similar stories of Jesus sending out the Twelve in Luke and the other synoptic Gospels, there are no direct parallels to this story of sending Seventy. The number seventy correlates to the number of all the earth's nations mentioned in Genesis 10, keeping with Jesus's mission field in the Lukan narrative "to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8).

Jesus appointed the Seventy to go out in pairs to places he intended to go himself. They will be more than heralds, rather proxies. They will do Jesus' work with his power and authority. Though Luke does not mention the Holy Spirit in this text, Christian tradition and doctrine have consistently ascribed this sort of transferred power from Jesus to others as the work of the Holy Spirit. Before the Seventy go, Jesus presents a frustrating problem to them. Many people need the gospel, but too few are willing to share it. He makes them aware of the dangers of performing this mission but promises that his power and presence will accompany them. He is faithful to his word, as we will see near the end of the text. They are to offer a healing ministry and proclaim the coming Kingdom of God. Little do they know they are fighting a spiritual war as they go about the mission to which Jesus sends them.

The text's climax is when the Seventy return to Jesus full of joy and astonishment by being conduits for his power. Their joy expresses their experience of the Holy Spirit's work. Joy is not the only possible outcome of experiencing the Holy Spirit, but it is the outcome for the Seventy. Their mission succeeds as Jesus appears to have anticipated.

Jesus affirms their experience but advises them to locate their joy not in the emotional high of their mission success but in their steadfast relationship with God.

The author of Luke probably composed this story more than five decades after the earthly ministry of Jesus, and presumably, some of the issues emphasized in his Gospel mirror the issues of the church in the author's time. "Very few scholars would maintain that the Gospel writers had no interest in historically accurate representation, and virtually no one would deny that they shaped their accounts of Jesus in ways that would highlight his significance for their readers."² This text draws attention to the urgent need of the church for more ministers and offers some lessons and encouragement for those God is calling to fulfill that role. Specifically, the text alleges that those who minister in Jesus' name and understand the significance of what they do will experience the Holy Spirit as they perform their ministry.

This project will involve immersing lay Communion visitors in an experiential symposium about the significance of Holy Communion to position them better to experience the Holy Spirit as they carry out their ministry. The Sending of the Seventy relates to the project because the Seventy grow to understand their ministry's significance and experience the Holy Spirit working through them as they minister. Likewise, those members of Mt. Olive who comprehend the significance of their Communion visitation ministry will also experience the Holy Spirit working through them in their ministry.

² Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 97.

Historical Context

The author of the Gospel of Luke (after this Luke) is anonymous, as are the other three Gospel writers of the New Testament. However, Luke itself illuminates several details about the author. First, whoever authored this book also wrote Acts as a sequel, picking up the Gospel's narrative at the ascension of Jesus. Second, in Acts, the author claims to be a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. Finally, utilizing the most extensive vocabulary of any New Testament writer³, the author was undoubtedly well-educated. The author's familiarity with classical literature and Hebrew scriptures is evident in his work. Regardless of the author's anonymity, what is clear is their position at the center of a fledgling Christian movement, providing them with an intimate familiarity with the issues at hand.

Though Luke is not dated, the “dominant scholarly view”⁴ is that the Gospel of Mark was an important source for its composition. Most scholars believe the collection of Jesus' sayings, known as Q, is also an essential source for the Gospel.⁵ “The primary alternative to the Q hypothesis proposes that this material originated with the Gospel of Matthew and that Luke took it from there.”⁶ Burkett summarily dismissed this alternative.⁷ The Gospel of Matthew makes use of Mark and Q as well. This fact

³ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 164.

⁴ Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 283.

⁵ Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 81.

⁶ Delbert Royce Burkett, *Rethinking the Gospel Sources*, Vol. 2 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 1, accessed January 4, 2023, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁷ Burkett, *Rethinking the Gospel Sources*, 32.

indicates that Luke was written concurrently with or sometime after Matthew. Most suppose Luke is concurrent with Matthew, as Luke does not appear to use it as a source.

On the other hand, John's Gospel often agrees with Luke, and some scholars believe Luke was a source for its writing.⁸ In addition, the author acknowledges Luke's story is not a first-hand account but something "handed on...by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses." (Luke 1:2). Since the Temple's destruction by the Romans in 70 C.E. is alluded to in the narrative, most scholars have estimated Luke wrote his Gospel in the 80s C.E. This period is marked by the movement of the church center away from Jerusalem and into the surrounding gentile world. This movement exponentially increased the audience for the gospel and the opportunities for evangelism.

Significant themes in Luke include salvation's genesis in God's covenant with Israel. Though salvation originates with the covenant, Israel is not the sole recipient, as God offers salvation to everyone. Also emphasized in this Gospel is the immediate nature of salvation in that salvation is a present reality that enables blessed living for those who live according to the will of God. Luke's theological orientation centers on Jesus within the context of a political world, especially when the author blatantly compares the secular powers of the world and Jesus, the savior and monarch of God's eternal Kingdom.

Finally, Luke relates a particular concern of God for the poor and vulnerable.

⁸ Barbara Shellard, "The Relationship of Luke and John: A Fresh Look at an Old Problem," *Journal of Theological Studies*, No. 46.1 (April 1995): 70-98, accessed April 5, 2022, Gale Academic OneFile.

Literary Context

Joel B. Green provides the following outline for Luke⁹:

- I. The Prologue (1:1-4)
- II. The Birth and Childhood of Jesus (1:5-2:52)
- III. The Preparation for the Ministry of Jesus (3:1-4:13)
- IV. The Ministry of Jesus in Galilee (4:14-9:50)
- V. On the Way to Jerusalem (9:51-19:48)
- VI. Teaching in the Jerusalem Temple (20:1-21:38)
- VII. The Suffering and Death of Jesus (22:1-23:56)
- VIII. The Exaltation of Jesus (24:1-53)

In the broader context of Luke, the Sending of the Seventy closely follows Luke's narrative midpoint within a section sometimes called the Travel Narrative. Having established the identity of Jesus and the nature of his mission in the early portions of Luke, the Travel Narrative leads readers to better understand the coming culmination of Jesus' work up to and including his final commissioning of his disciples. The tension builds throughout this section as the reader anticipates Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem.

In its immediate context, the Sending of the Seventy occurs almost immediately following Luke's announcement that Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." (Luke 9:51). This phrase indicates Jesus' intention and commitment to move his ministry from the rural region of Galilee to Jerusalem, the religious and political center of the area. Jesus' intention is obedience to a divine imperative alluded to in Luke's Transfiguration story. In the story, Moses and Elijah, acting as agents of God, appear to Jesus on a mountain and relay information to him about what "he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31). This geographic shift of Jesus' mission field from the rural Galilee to the urban Jerusalem marks a crucial turning point in Luke's narrative that sets a new tone as

⁹ Mark Allan Powell, *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers and The Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 573.

well. Without explicitly naming Jerusalem, Jesus foretold the Twelve that suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection awaited him in that city. (Luke 9:22). Consequently, the upcoming narrative, of which the Sending of the Seventy is a part, is colored with anticipation of difficult circumstances for Jesus and his followers.

Functionally, the Sending of the Seventy assures that even in the physical absence of Jesus, his power is still fully present and effective. As Acts will reveal, this is possible only through the work of the Holy Spirit. The concern about Jesus' spiritual presence was ubiquitous in the late first-century church as Jesus' return failed to manifest imminently as most expected. Indeed, the same concern remains today after over two millennia of waiting. The belief in Jesus' imminent return required recalculation when decades passed, and Jesus had not returned. In Acts, the sequel to Luke, of prime concern is the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit in place of concrete physicality. Even the title later attached to volume two, Acts, refers to the acts Jesus performed through the Holy Spirit by way of the church. Luke asserts that Jesus and his power remain present in and through his followers. The Sending of the Seventy is Luke's preview of what Jesus will do through the Holy Spirit in Acts' account of the early church.

Canonical Context

The Sending of the Seventy introduces a new biblical possibility – that the Holy Spirit might empower many for God's work rather than a few. In the Hebrew Scriptures, single characters, typically kings and prophets, were empowered by God to carry out God's will. However, there are exceptions. The prophet Joel declares, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old

men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female slaves, in those days I will pour out my spirit.” (Joel 2:28-29). In the New Testament, Jesus, in whom the Spirit dwells, can transmit the Spirit’s power to others. The first example is in Luke 9:1-2 “Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.” The other synoptic Gospels record the same story. (Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7). All three synoptic Gospels include the narrative of Jesus’ transmission of power to the Twelve, but Luke is unique in expanding that number to seventy and including disciples who were not part of the select Twelve. Though Luke does not mention the name of the Holy Spirit in this passage, longstanding church tradition and doctrine attests to this power transmission from Jesus to his followers being the work of the Holy Spirit.

Formal Analysis

Luke belongs to the literary genre of ancient biography. Unlike modern biographies, Luke and the other Gospels never intended to be objective or comprehensive. The writers of the Gospels each had unique perspectives on Jesus Christ, and they wrote to persuade others that their perspective was trustworthy. Their biographies omitted many details and often disregarded facts such as timelines and character names. The goal of the Gospel writers was to inspire the reader and change their worldview with the story of Jesus, which was of ultimate significance.¹⁰

¹⁰ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 82-85.

The following is a working outline of the chosen passage:

- I. Recruiting (10:1-2)
- II. Instructing (10:3-4)
- III. Power of Peace (10:5-7)
- IV. Welcome and Hospitality (10:8-11)
- V. Prophetic Woes (10:12-16)
- VI. Returning in Joy (10:17-20)

The passage's movement is thus: it begins with extensive instructions from Jesus about how the Seventy are to conduct their ministry. Then, it devolves into a prophetic tirade against all who reject said ministry. Finally, it concludes with a celebration of the efficacy of the ministry due to Jesus' power being with the Seventy in their assigned task.

Detailed Analysis

1-2

There is biblical and theological significance in the number seventy. Most scholars agree that the number corresponds to the number mentioned in Genesis 10, which in Jewish thought represents the total number of all the nations of the earth.¹¹ Fitzmyer asserts that this number foreshadows the evangelization of both the "Gentiles and the diaspora Jews by the disciples."¹² According to most scholars, Luke wrote this when evangelization beyond the Palestinian Jews was already occurring. Also significant is Jesus' instruction for the Seventy to pair up for their ministry. Mark's earlier Gospel

¹¹ Francois Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, Edited by Helmut Koester. Translated by Donald S. Deer. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 26.

¹² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*. The Anchor Yale Bible, Vol. 28a (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 846.

includes the same instruction given to the Twelve. (Mark 6:7). Fitzmyer points out that two was the required number of witnesses in a judicial case.¹³ The pairs of ministers have accountability with each other as they deliver the truth to those they encounter. This accountability also lends credibility to their witness. Some translations read the Seventy were sent “before his face” rather than “ahead of him,” which Green interprets as assigning them the credentials of “full participants in the divine mission.”¹⁴ Jesus determines the itinerary of the Seventy as locations “he himself intended to go.” (Luke 10:1). Whether Jesus intends to go to such places as part of his coming ministry or in the eschaton is a question Fitzmyer raises.¹⁵ Jesus employs the harvest metaphor to describe his mission, to which he called the Seventy to be participants. Here, the harvest metaphor is positive, referring to reaping the fruit of God’s labors. In the Old Testament, the harvest metaphor conjured a less positive concept, primarily symbolic of God’s judgment. That familiar farming metaphor would have resonated well with the agrarian society to which Jesus belonged. Despite the positive connotation of harvest in this passage, Bovon points out that “joy is threatened by the lack of laborers, and that fear gives rise to prayer.”¹⁶ When the fruit ripens, there is time pressure on farmers to harvest, so they temporarily hire additional workers. The Seventy appear to be those additional workers brought on to assist the Twelve. This detail lends the passage an urgency – harvesting must be done soon, or the produce will be lost.

¹³ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 846.

¹⁴ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 412.

¹⁵ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 846.

¹⁶ Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 26.

3-4

As this passage follows closely on the heels of the moment Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51), the mood has changed. Jesus and his followers no longer live in a time “when Jesus’ presence was a guarantee of peace and security.”¹⁷ Welcome and hospitality can no longer be assumed. Jesus tells the Seventy that he sends them out as “lambs into the midst of wolves.” (Luke 10:3). It is well established that such animals do not interact peaceably in nature, and the early church of Luke’s day experienced a similar hostility with their environment. However, the prophet Isaiah foretold a day in which “The wolf shall live with the lamb” (Isaiah 11:6). This prophecy anticipates a reconciliation of even the worst enemies. The “lambs” return not only unscathed but “with joy.” (Luke 10:17).

After warning the Seventy of the possible dangers of their mission, Jesus also instructs them to travel light, leaving behind even the most essential gear for traveling – no purse, bag, or sandals. Green asserts that urgency was the reasoning behind such instruction and that urgency would also require “single-minded dedication to their task.”¹⁸ Indeed, Jesus commands them to avoid taking the time even to greet people on the road. Bovon and Fitzmyer question the motivation of this odd command. Both conclude that the work Jesus calls the Seventy to is set apart from the mundane. There is no time for pleasant formalities in the face of such urgency.

¹⁷ Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 27.

¹⁸ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 413.

5-7

The mission of the Seventy begins in houses and radiates out into the towns. Bovon calls this movement from “personal contacts” to “public proclamation.”¹⁹ The initial greeting of the missionaries, which is also the first ministerial act, is to offer peace to the household. “Peace” here is more than an absence of conflict; it is synonymous with salvation, “completeness, wholeness.”²⁰ As such, it is more akin to the Hebrew concept of “shalom” than the Greco-Roman concept of peace. This peace is a gift from God that the Seventy will steward in their mission. It is a transmissible gift that can be accepted or rejected. Jesus assumes an exceptional quality in a person who will accept the gift of peace. If rejected, the peace returns to the minister and is not lost or diminished. Those who accept the peace will welcome the missionary pair and give them room and board as compensation.

Like with a harvest, the additional help brought on during harvest time is, and should be, compensated. While the household is to give hospitality, the missionaries show respect and loyalty by committing to that one house and refusing to move around to more desirable accommodations.

8-11

This section expands the mission field from the house to the town. We are left to assume the house remains an essential base for the missionary activity as Jesus orders the pairs to remain there for their assignment. What is certain is that the ministry transitioned

¹⁹ Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 27.

²⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 848.

into a very public task as it moved from house to town. Bovon points out that Jesus assumes a “collective acceptance or rejection of the gospel” in these towns.²¹

Once received, the missionaries are to proclaim salvation in deed and word. Curing the sick is mentioned before announcing the coming Kingdom, but both acts serve as gospel proclamations. The therapeutic act of healing also signals the restorative character of the coming Kingdom. As with gifting peace, the word-and-deed proclamation relies entirely on God for its efficacy.

The Seventy have both the privilege and responsibility to do God’s work. Fitzmyer points out that while one glimpses the Kingdom in the ministry of the Seventy, “the day of the kingdom’s full arrival is still in the future.”²² This passage imagines the world’s spatial relationship with the Kingdom, as Luke tells us it “has come near.” (Luke 10:9).

Unfortunately, “the proximity of the kingdom does not prevent its being rejected.”²³ Indeed, Jesus anticipates that rejection will be a part of their missionary experience for the Seventy and instructs them on how to react to such rejection. In the face of rejection, the Seventy are expected to behave in a manner reminiscent of the prophets. They are to publicly wipe off the dust of the town that clings to their feet. Bovon recognizes a specificity to this act that is pregnant with meaning. As the Seventy return the dust to the town, they indicate they take nothing from it. In effect, wiping off the dust signifies “we’re even” and “we haven’t taken anything of yours,” thereby

²¹ Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 28.

²² Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 849.

²³ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 849.

implying the end of a relationship rather than an act of cursing.”²⁴ Regardless, the world, whether it accepts or rejects the message of the Kingdom, has no power to stop its coming or insulate itself from its impact.

12-16

Fitzmyer explains that this passage section is “more like an aside...than an integral part of the instructions”²⁵ to the Seventy. However, the section supports the larger pericope as it illuminates the gravity of the consequences should a town reject the mission of the Seventy. Jesus points out that rejecting the missionaries is synonymous with rejecting Jesus, ultimately rejecting God. Jesus compares such rejection with the sins of Sodom. Though tradition has interpreted Sodom’s sin as sexual, the fundamental error of that town was its refusal to offer hospitality and attempt hostility to God’s messengers.

Nevertheless, the refusal of the Seventy is an even greater sin because the Kingdom of God is ever nearer than during the time of Sodom’s destruction. Bovon suggests that to Luke’s Jesus, “it is more serious to close one’s heart and mind to the proclamation of the kingdom of God in the Gospels than to have that attitude toward the Law or Prophets.”²⁶ Jesus sympathetically announces woes to three towns Jesus has already visited and experienced rejection: Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. This mention is Luke’s first and last of Chorazin, and scholars know little about the place. Bethsaida was where Jesus fed the five thousand. Capernaum was the location of four

²⁴ Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 29.

²⁵ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 850.

²⁶ Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 29.

healing miracles recorded in Luke, so it was without excuse for rejecting something to which it received abundant witness. The rejection of these towns took the form of refusing to repent. Green states that “this is the first use of the term ‘repent’ in the public ministry of Jesus.”²⁷ Had these towns reoriented their lives to God’s will, that would have been the only appropriate response to the preaching of the gospel.

The Gospel necessitates a response, either acceptance or rejection. No one can remain the same after hearing the Gospel. Jesus warns that what is at stake for such towns that respond with rejection is that they “will be brought down to Hades.” (Luke 10:15). Scholars debate what this warning means, and the spectrum of interpretations ranges from divine punishment to societal disgrace. Either way, rejection has severe and painful consequences. Concluding this section on a positive note, the consequences of rejection fortify the Seventy’s solidarity with Jesus and, by extension, God. The Seventy’s message and ministry equate with that of the divine.

17-20

This concluding section of the pericope assumes a time gap has occurred, as the Seventy now return from a completed, successful, and effective mission. Despite eight verses dealing with the possibility of rejection of the Seventy’s mission, there are no reports of rejection. The byproduct of their mission is their joy. The missionaries appear astounded that they were bearers and conduits of Jesus’ authority and power. “In your name” indicates they understand that the effectiveness of their mission rests solely on Jesus as the mission also belongs to him. These three words provide a clue that the

²⁷ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 417.

Seventy comprehended the significance of their ministry – that they were doing God’s work. It appears vital for Jesus that the Seventy understand the ministry’s significance. His response to them further illuminates the meaning of their work by interpreting their success as a victory over evil forces.

Jesus uses the metaphor of Satan falling from heaven to describe the work of the missionaries. This statement is the first time Luke has referred to “Satan,” although it will not be the last. “Devil” has been used in this Gospel, but “Satan” seems to refer to the chief devil. “Satan is the cosmic power...behind all forms of opposition to God and God’s people.”²⁸ Green asks the critical question: “When did Satan fall?”²⁹ Though the answer is unclear, Jesus appears to be speaking prophetically of a future event already being signified by the mission of Jesus and his followers. At any rate, the event Jesus refers to never happens within the biblical narrative.

Despite the confusion with this statement, Luke clarifies that Jesus equates Seventy’s mission with a spiritual battle against evil powers. Presumably, the Seventy are aware that the results of this battle are of ultimate consequence. Even at the climax of the passage, Jesus issues a gentle corrective regarding the source of the Seventy’s joy. They are experiencing a spiritual and emotional high resulting from their ministry experience, but Jesus guides their thinking so that they will base their joy on their relationship with God rather than on their “good work” of ministry. They are known and cared for by God; this is the truth to be celebrated more than anything else.

²⁸ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 420.

²⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 418.

Their experience of the Holy Spirit may not always be one of joy, as the Spirit may convey other feelings, but the assurance of God's steadfast love will forever be a source of joy for them. As Fitzmyer articulates: "the reason for their joy...is that God himself has inscribed the names of these representatives of Jesus in the book of life."³⁰

Synthesis

God positions Christians to experience the Holy Spirit better when they comprehend the spiritual significance of their ministry. Most mainline congregations in the United States experience greater demand for pastoral care than they have staff to address the need. Jesus' words at the beginning of this passage, referring to an abundant harvest and too few harvesters, resonate in these congregations. In Jesus' situation, his solution was appointing more disciples to address the demand.

The context for this project, Mt. Olive, has a great demand for Communion visitors but too few volunteers. The ministry of the Seventy was not specifically eucharistic, but their charge was to make Jesus Christ and his grace present to those they ministered to. To make Jesus Christ and his grace present for others is the ministry of a Communion visitor.

In the baptismal liturgy of Mt. Olive's denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, baptismal candidates are charged with participating in the church's ministry. All members of a congregation are "appointed" through their baptisms. The charge goes: "learn to trust God, proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others

³⁰ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 860.

and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.”³¹ By baptism, every member of Mt. Olive has publicly assented to these tasks being an essential part of their vocation as followers of Jesus. Their parallels with this chosen bible text are apparent in each phrase of this baptismal charge.

“Learn to trust God,” listed first, seems to take precedence over the other phrases of the charge. Similarly, Jesus directs the Seventy to prioritize their relationship with God above all else: “rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Jesus certainly could not mean passive gratitude for God’s love and acceptance was the totality of the Seventy’s discipleship. Instead, Jesus points them to what is most important: their relationship with God. This relationship will perpetually call them to, and free and equip them for, action for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

“Proclaim Christ through word and deed.”³² The second phrase of the baptismal charge is what Jesus tells the Seventy to do. They are to proclaim Christ in word as part of their announcement of his coming Kingdom and, in deed, through their fellowship and healing work among the people. Both word and deed take on a sacramental quality in the biblical text. As the Seventy experience, their deeds are effective because the power of Jesus is present in them through the Holy Spirit. Their words, particularly their offering of peace, also take on a physical quality during their ministry. The Seventy can give peace to those who accept it, and that peace will return when some reject it.

³¹ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Pew ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 228.

³² Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 228.

“Care for others and the world God made”³³ is a charge fulfilled as the Seventy perform their task. They display care, not only by offering life-giving ministry to every town and place Jesus intends to go but also by their method of ministry. Jesus tells them to be respectful and eat what their hosts place before them. He also instructs them to be loyal to their hosts and stay in one place during their mission. Finally, their therapeutic ministry of healing is indeed a manifestation of the charge to care.

“Work for justice and peace.” The ministry of the Seventy embodies justice through the Seventy’s commitment to staying in one place. Scholars agree Jesus gave this instruction so the Seventy would not move to wealthier families with more comfortable homes or give preference to relationships with people in power throughout their stay.³⁴ The announcement of the coming Kingdom is also justice work as Luke makes clear the Kingdom will embody God’s justice. Working for peace is blatantly commanded by Jesus. The Seventy’s first task as they enter a house is to say, “Peace to this house.” They are to be stewards of God’s peace and can grant it to any who will receive it.

This chapter has established that Mt. Olive greatly needs laborers, especially those doing Communion visits. However important, this project is not focused on the need of pastoral care recipients but rather on the lay Communion visitors’ experience of the Holy Spirit when they better comprehend the significance of Holy Communion.

Like the Seventy in Luke 10, followers of Jesus Christ in every time and every place experience the Holy Spirit when participating in ministry in which they understand

³³ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 228.

³⁴ Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51-19:27*, 28.

its significance. Many have experienced the Holy Spirit working as they understand the significance of ministry performed in Jesus' name.

Jesus sent the Seventy out as lambs among wolves. There are risks involved in any arena of ministry, including Communion visits. Not everyone is receptive to forms of pastoral care. The emotionally charged nature of visiting vulnerable people induces anxiety in some people, and their fight or flight mechanism is instinctively triggered. As Jesus warns, not everyone will receive his peace.

Communion visits often occur in situations and settings fraught with anxiety. Though ministers encounter plenty of "wolves" in those they seek to minister, they must also conquer the "wolf" from within. Ministers go into pastoral care situations with a fear of failure and self-doubt. In such cases, the minister would do well to remember the Seventy who were effective in their ministry, not due to their giftedness but because the Holy Spirit was working through them. Jesus also equipped the Seventy with detailed instructions for their mission. This project will include training in best practices to prepare lay Communion visitors to perform their tasks competently.

Jesus' mandate for the Seventy to remain in the same house reinforces the value of building relationships with those to whom one ministers. Creating trust is incredibly important for offering pastoral care. When people feel unsafe, they shut down and become difficult to reach emotionally and spiritually. Ministers must demonstrate trustworthiness through confidentiality. Boundaries of both minister and recipient must be established, adhered to, and maintained.

Pastoral care relationships require more listening than speaking. There is always a temptation to offer cliches and easy answers to distressed people, but these offerings are

often unhelpful. Listening deeply to problems without offering solutions is a vital part of pastoral care. The mission of lay Communion visitors is to bring the presence of Jesus to the sick and shut-in. Lay Communion visitors extend the table to those unable to reach it. Their ministry brings Jesus through offering Communion, which brings forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Conclusion

Christian tradition and doctrine agree with Jesus that Christians find ultimate joy in their relationship with God. The central theme of Lutheranism is to prioritize faith over works. However, works are not unimportant, even if God does not require them for salvation. Grace, the gift of unconditional love and acceptance from God because of Jesus, not only saves Christians once and for all but takes hold of them and becomes a dynamic force of transformation in their lives.

God created humankind and redeemed them for relationships, including working with God for his purposes. God does not need humanity's help to accomplish his ministry in the world, but God knows the transformative power people will experience from participating in his ministry. Praying, worshiping, and reading Holy Scripture are essential to encounter God's heart. This encounter is God's greatest desire for humans.

After God liberated the Israelites from the Egyptians, a mighty act of God that God invited Moses and the Israelites to participate in, God explains why he went to the trouble: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:4). God wants to bring all people to himself, to

have them encounter his heart. Participating in God's work is another way we encounter God's heart.

Whether God is working through ministers to give salvific grace and faith or through them to manifest his Kingdom, God positions ministers to experience the Holy Spirit better when they understand the spiritual significance of their work. This chapter argues that the experience of the Holy Spirit described in the Sending of the Seventy is still available to disciples today who understand the significance of following Jesus' call.

This biblical text supports this project's hypothesis. When lay Communion visitors of Mt. Olive participated in an educational symposium about the spiritual significance of Holy Communion, they were positioned to experience the Holy Spirit move as they administered it to the church's sick and shut-in members. The passage supports the hypothesis by providing a biblical example of lay ministers comprehending the significance of their ministry and, in turn, experiencing the Holy Spirit. In addition, the passage addressed Mt. Olive's problem that lay Communion visitors lack awareness of the Holy Spirit's work in them as they make Communion visits.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

“While it is true that theological error may have disastrous consequences for the Christian life, it is also true that those who do not go beyond dogma have scarcely penetrated the riches of Christianity.”¹ Church historian and author Jose Gonzalez wrote those words to express a fundamental truth: Christians who exercise their divine vocations grow in their faith. Nevertheless, as Gonzalez proposes, understanding theology is also essential. For vibrant faith to develop from doing ministry, Christians must also understand the significance of that ministry. Consequently, the Church must empower her members to live out their callings and educate and inspire them about the significance of those callings.

When Christians understand the significance of their ministry, God positions them to experience the Holy Spirit better as they perform their ministry. The historical foundation for this project is the Pietist movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This movement within the church provides numerous examples of lay ministers

¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2: The Reformation to the Present Day*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne/HarperCollins, 2010), 260.

experiencing the Holy Spirit's work as they came to understand the significance of the ministry they were called to perform.

Pietism, a movement reacting to Lutheran Orthodoxy, began in the mid-seventeenth century and ended in the eighteenth century. Pietism, broadly speaking, has always existed throughout the history of Christianity and continues to present. However, there is consensus that a distinguishable movement occurred in the period bounded by the lives of two key figures: Philipp Jakob Spener, Lutheran pastor and founder of the movement, and John Wesley, Anglican priest and leader of the pietistic movement known as Methodism.

Pietism emphasizes Christian faith as dynamic and requiring persistent nurturing through worship, prayer, Bible study, and other spiritual disciplines. This era deemphasized the distinction between clergy and lay persons as the Pietists believed all Christians have a shared responsibility for ministry. While worship, preaching, and the sacraments were still of primary importance for the Pietists, they also emphasized other personal devotion practices. These practices often took place outside worship gatherings and were usually beyond the supervision of clergy.

The Pietists' unique view of the laity within Christian history empowered lay men and women to participate in ministry in ways not possible during any other period of the church. The age of Pietism left valuable, if not bountiful, records of the experience of lay people performing ministry. There is little question of these lay ministers' enormous impact on those they ministered to and the church. However, the goal of this research is not to prove the success of the Pietists' lay ministry. Instead, this writing aims to illuminate the experience of the Holy Spirit lay ministers received resulting from

experiencing the significance of their ministry. The ministry they performed changed the quality of these lay people's lives. This is not to say that their lives were easy or constantly happy, nor that the only outcome of their ministry was joy. Ministry life was difficult then, as it is today, but the Pietists found joy, purpose, endurance, patience, peace, faithfulness, and contentment in their ministry experience.

This chapter will examine the events that led to the Pietist movement, introduce its key players, and relate examples of Pietist lay ministers experiencing the Holy Spirit as they carried out their ministry. The lay ministers recorded some of their experiences of the Holy Spirit; the remainder can be deduced from their tireless long-term commitment to the work God called them. There is no better sign of the Spirit's work than when lay ministers persevere despite frustrations and challenges. Therefore, their faithfulness and forbearance point to an experience of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Historical Context of Pietism

Pietism emerged at the height of the Lutheran Orthodox movement. Martin Luther was a capable bible scholar who held strong positions on Christian theology, but he was no systematician. Though Luther's writings laid a framework for Lutheran doctrine, others, such as Philip Melanchthon, were left to develop a theology system that would codify a new denomination's beliefs. Melanchthon was arguably more important to creating the Lutheran Confessions than Luther. The Confessions articulated what Lutherans believed and unified the teachings of Lutheran congregations across Europe.

Following the Thirty Years' War, Lutheran scholars recognized the fragility of their doctrine and took great pains to preserve and protect it. The age of Orthodoxy was

when Lutherans revived practices of the Medieval Scholastic tradition to study, analyze, apply, and structure Lutheran doctrine.² Pietism was birthed out of this era and sought not to undo Orthodoxy's work but to enhance it. "While the Orthodox focused on the correct presentation and apprehension of the Christian faith in all of its articles, the Pietists focused on the personal application of the truths of Christianity in the lives of God's people."³ Although Pietism was a reaction to, rather than a rejection of, Orthodoxy, the two movements maintained a strained and uncomfortable relationship.

One area of tension between the two movements was their differing views on the role of pastors. The Orthodox position held that the office of public ministry was necessary because God had instituted it. Third-party mediators, such as a congregation, were required to call one to public ministry. Not only was the congregation an essential part of a person's call, but the whole church, from its authorities to its laity, was to be involved. In addition, before serving a call, the candidate for ministry was examined to ensure he (only males could be candidates at the time) was qualified for the role. Much of what made for pastoral qualifications, besides wealth and class, were intellectual gifts and technical knowledge of ministry and theology. A pastor was expected to know Lutheran theology well and be able to teach and communicate its truths. This standard made the pastoral role an academic one.

Pietists believed pastors were more responsible for helping people grow in faith than for teaching theological positions. They also believed that pastors alone were not sufficient for the enormous task. They believed that "ministry is a gift to the whole

² Todd W. Nichol and Marc Kolden, *Called and Ordained: Lutheran Perspectives on the Office of the Ministry* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 67.

³ Nichol and Kolden, *Called and Ordained*, 68.

church and that all the members of the church as spiritual priests before God must exercise the ministry they had received.”⁴ Therefore, pietists formed small groups to fortify the laity’s faith so they could conduct private ministry daily. It is important to note that Pietists never challenged the Orthodox view of the office of public ministry. Though Orthodox and Pietists sought different emphases for pastors, they agreed on all the essentials of call and ordination.

Spener and Lutheran Piety

Most scholars agree that Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) is the father of Pietism. Born to a life of privilege, Spener had the advantage of a quality education and excelled in his studies. Before the age of thirty, he had earned the title of Doctor of Theology.⁵ Though accomplished as a scholar, he had no pastoral experience when he received his first call as senior pastor of the Lutheran churches of Frankfurt am Main. This position included the supervision of several congregations and a dozen clergy. It was in Frankfurt that Spener rose to prominence. His approach to pastoring included a particular emphasis on teaching and life application. He famously organized small groups called the *Collegia Pietatis* (pious groups), which served to equip and empower participants to live out their faith in daily life.

During his time in Frankfurt, Spener wrote *Pia Desideria*, proposing six church reforms. These proposals were: “1) more extensive use of the scriptures 2) exercise of the spiritual priesthood 3) practice versus knowledge of Christianity 4) conduct of religious

⁴ Nichol and Kolden, *Called and Ordained*, 73.

⁵ Carter Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 84.

controversies 5) reform of schools and universities 6) preaching for purposes of edification.”⁶ Spener, like Luther, sought to reform a church he dearly loved. Spener was born and raised during the age of Orthodoxy and never viewed his reforms as an attack upon it but rather an enhancement with practices of piety. Nevertheless, “Spener still desired reform of his visible Church – not of its pure doctrine but of its impure life.”⁷

Spener argued that Luther’s teachings aligned with and inspired his own. This claim was especially valid with Spener’s second proposed church reform, the exercise of the spiritual priesthood. “Nobody can read Luther’s writings with some care without observing how earnestly the sainted man advocated this spiritual priesthood, according to which not only ministers but all Christians are made priests by their Savior, are anointed by the Holy Spirit, and are dedicated to perform spiritual-priestly acts.”⁸

While Luther indeed saw ministry as a duty bestowed upon all Christians, his ideas on “good order” within the church did little to empower laity for these so-called “spiritual-priestly acts.” Luther’s writing about the common priesthood is sparse and intended as a rebuttal of priestly authority as taught by the Catholic Church.

Luther taught that priests or any mediators between God and people were unnecessary, as Jesus is sufficient as a priest for all. Therefore, all believers may approach God in prayer and praise. This belief is what Luther most often intended by the phrase “common priesthood.” However, there were circumstances when Luther expanded the definition of this concept: “Luther again argues that each and every Christian, by

VII. ⁶ Philipp Jakob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, Seminar Editions (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1964),

⁷ Lindberg, *The Pietist Theologians*, 86.

⁸ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 92.

reason of the common priesthood, has the right to minister in the Word and the duty so to do if there are no other teachers in the church or only heretical teachers.”⁹ Luther wrote,

Now, if Christians have the Word of God and are anointed by Him, they are in duty bound to confess, preach and spread this Word. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:13, “We have the same spirit of faith, and therefore we speak”; and the prophet says in Psalm 116:10, “I believed, therefore I speak”; and in Psalm 51:13, he says in the name of all Christians, “I will teach transgressors thy ways, that sinners may be converted unto thee.” These passages prove once more that a Christian not only has the right and power to teach God’s Word, but is in duty bound to teach it on pain of losing his salvation and forfeiting God’s favor.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Luther’s writings are often reactionary, which caused a tendency toward contradiction. For the most part, Luther held that public ministry was solely within the purview of the pastor.

For Spener, the Orthodox teaching that ministry belonged entirely to the clergy was destructive to the church and the laity’s faith. “The consequence has been that the so-called laity has been made slothful in those things that ought to concern it; a terrible ignorance has resulted, and from this, in turn, a disorderly life.”¹¹ Ironically, “good order” in the church could lead to “a disorderly life” for members of that same church. However, Spener believed that for a person’s faith to remain vital and resilient, they must practice it regularly, even constantly.

Spener maintained a sensitivity to Luther’s “good order” in his teachings by distinguishing between private and public ministry. Private ministry occurred in homes,

⁹ B. A. Gerrish, “Priesthood and Ministry in the Theology of Luther,” *Church History*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (1965): 406, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3163119>.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, “The Right and Power of a Christian Congregation or Community to Judge all Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proved from Scripture,” *CheckLuther.com*, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://www.checkluther.com/wp-content/uploads/1523-The-Right-and-Power-of-a-Christian-Congregation-or-Community-to-Judge-etc..pdf>.

¹¹ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 93.

schools, and workplaces where clergy members were likely absent much of the week. Public ministry was in the context of the gathered assembly for worship, where clergy was always present.

Spener actively encouraged lay ministry in the private context: "...as if it were not proper for laymen diligently to study in the Word of the Lord, much less to instruct, admonish, chastise, and comfort their neighbors, or to do privately what pertains to the ministry publicly, insomuch as all these things were supposed to belong only to the office of the minister."¹² Spener understood the need for ministry in all areas of life, not just during weekly worship. He held this position in tension with an enduring conviction that public ministry remained the domain of the clergy. While God calls all Christians to private ministries, the laity is "...not called to the public exercise of them, which requires appointment by a congregation with equal right."¹³

Spener famously dedicated Halle University, which became the center of Pietism. Halle was Spener's model for theological education reform and would become the launching point for Lutheran foreign missions. Ironically, Spener's influence was not enough to produce lay missionaries of the Lutheran denomination during his lifetime.

Spener's successor, August Hermann Francke, head of Halle University and, therefore, also head of the Danish-Halle Mission (Lutheran), sent only trained clergy as missionaries. These missionaries stressed the importance of preaching and education. Even their conversion process entailed long-term religious instruction. The values of the

¹² Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 93.

¹³ Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 94.

missionaries did not align with a movement identified by the values of living faith over intellectual understanding.

Perhaps Spener's distinction between public and private exercise of ministry had taken an overly strong hold on the movement to allow opportunities for lay missionaries, whose work would most certainly have been in the public sphere. While Spener's work did not directly lead to lay empowerment for ministry, the movement he began and championed throughout his life would eventually birth public ministry for the laity.

Zinzendorf and the Moravians

Pietism did not end with Spener but continued to strengthen and evolve in significant ways for the church. Eventually, Pietism created inroads for the laity to participate in public ministry. Author John Weinlick tells us, "Laymen, under its (Piety's) impetus, began to take an active part in the church, to read the Bible, to pray, to share their religion with like-minded friends in extra church meetings."¹⁴ No other movement involved and empowered lay persons to the extent of the Moravians.

The Moravian movement of the eighteenth century began when religiously oppressed Bohemians fled their homeland during early modern Catholicism and found a new home in Saxony on property owned by Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf, a Lutheran layperson and noble, was heavily influenced by Pietism, which

¹⁴ John R. Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf* (New York, NY; Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1956), 8, https://archive.org/details/countzinzendorf0000wein_p6n3/mode/2up.

was natural, having been the godson of Philipp Jakob Spener.¹⁵ Moreover, Zinzendorf himself attended school at Halle, a Pietist hotbed.

In addition to sheltering the Bohemian exiles, Zinzendorf's fervent piety shaped the emerging community into what would eventually become the Moravian Church. It was under the inspiration of Halle that Zinzendorf began the development of his estate into a community for religious and educational networks.¹⁶

The developing community was named Herrnhut and became a refuge for other types of persecuted Christians beyond the Bohemians. Unsurprisingly, conflict soon arose among these people with widely varying beliefs. However, beginning with Bible study and prayer, the diverse community devised and agreed to live by a set of common disciplines, bringing unity.

The Moravian faith community placed Christian living above creeds and confessions. Spiritual elders were appointed, and these were laypeople rather than clerics. "The first elders were men who worked with their hands and who represented such skills as carpenter, weaver, cutler, potter, cobbler."¹⁷ Within months, the newly unified community experienced a spiritual revival, which led them into radical communal living, which was intended to mirror the early church.

At this point, Zinzendorf organized the community into small groups for accountability. The small groups evolved into "choirs" divided by age, sex, and marital status. The choirs "met daily for worship and discussion in the room of the chosen leader,

¹⁵ Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 14.

¹⁶ Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 68-69.

¹⁷ Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 75.

at work, under a tree, as the Spirit moved them, and quite informal fashion.”¹⁸ With these practices, lay ministry became the norm for the Moravian community. Weinlick shares this account of the ministry of layman and potter Martin Dober:

At five he led the congregation in morning worship in the chapel of the orphanage. In attendance were some distinguished and learned people. At nine o'clock he might be visited by a count, a nobleman, or a professor, who found him barefoot in his shop. For him that was quite proper. They seated themselves before his potter's wheel and paid heed to his words.¹⁹

Interestingly, the empowerment of lay ministry among the Moravians did not undermine the role of the clergy. Instead, lay ministry fortified the faith formation of the community.

The day-to-day ministry of lay people did not replace the Sunday morning service with its sacraments. However, Zinzendorf fervently believed in the importance of lay people taking an active role in ministry and utterly rejected passive faith for any person. Weinlick notes that up to this point, “The layman's role was the entirely passive one of accepting the dogmas which he heard expounded from the pulpit, of partaking faithfully of the sacraments, of sharing in the ordinances of the church. That kind of religion could not satisfy a crushed and poverty-stricken people.”²⁰ Neither does it satisfy any people.

While visiting Copenhagen to attend the coronation of King Christian IV, Zinzendorf coincidentally met a man from the West Indies and two Inuit from Greenland, all pleading for missionaries. Zinzendorf took this plea back to Herrnhut, where the response was immediate. Two lay persons, potter Johann Leonhard Dober and carpenter and lay pastor David Nitschmann, volunteered to go to the West Indies to minister

¹⁸ Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 84.

¹⁹ Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 87.

²⁰ Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 8.

specifically to the enslaved peoples there. Having experienced the significance of the gospel of Jesus Christ and its transforming power in their own lives, these two men were inspired to leave everything behind to take the message to others. They planned to sell themselves into slavery to gain close access to those they wished to minister. Because they were white, they could not become enslaved, but they still found a way to conduct their mission to the enslaved people. These two were the first Protestant missionaries of the modern era.

More similarly inspired lay missionaries were sent to other lands soon afterward, including gravedigger Matthaues Stach and his cousin Christian, along with carpenter Christian David, to Greenland. Moravians were the first Protestant missionaries to send lay people, rather than the theologically trained clergy, to do this ministry. Within the next three decades, Moravians sent missionaries around the globe. The movement deployed 226 missionaries in the first 30 years of its existence.²¹

The Moravians converted many people but also influenced many other Christians. John Wesley, Methodism's founder, pointed to the Moravians and the influence of their vibrant faith as a significant factor that led to the "strange warming" of his heart. Wesley even considered joining the Moravians but remained loyal to the Anglican church.

The Moravian movement of the eighteenth century offers a glimpse of effective lay ministry, which can inform such a practice today. The Moravians removed most hierarchical structures within their movement, which enabled the laity to perform

²¹ Regina Ganter, "German Missionaries in Australia: Moravians (Herrnhut) (1722-1869)," *Griffith.edu*, accessed January 31, 2023, <http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/missionary-training/moravians-herrnhut-1722-1869>.

ministerial duties associated with theologically trained clergy. The movement, which grew out of prayer, fellowship, and Bible study, empowered and inspired the laity, and their joy and fulfillment, as well as the multiplication of ministry, was the result. In addition, the way the Moravians empowered the laity avoided undermining the role of the clergy.

John Wesley and the Methodists

John Wesley, the eldest son of an Anglican priest father and formidable Pietist mother (whose father was an Anglican priest), was born in 1703. Wesley's mother committed herself to educating all her children, girls and boys. As a result, the children began their education as early as possible, learned Greek and Latin, and memorized large sections of the New Testament.

Wesley was sent away for schooling at eleven and proved to be an excellent student. After graduating from Christ Church, Oxford, Wesley intended his career to be in academics, even beginning to lecture at the university, but received God's call to ministry and began serving a parish after earning his master's degree.

At this time, Wesley began an intellectual and spiritual search for ways to enact his living faith in practical ways. This search provided a foundation upon which Wesley would attempt to "tie together the perfectionism of the Pietists, the moralism of the Puritans, and the devotionism of the Mystics in a pragmatic approach that he felt could operate within the structure and doctrine of the Church of England."²²

²² Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 39, ProQuest Ebook Central.

The church cut Wesley's service in a parish short and asked him to return to Oxford as a junior fellow. By this point, Wesley's younger brother Charles was studying at Oxford and had begun a small club to study and practice Christian piety. The Pietist tradition had impressed him "that true religion was seated in the heart and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions."²³ So Wesley took the reins of the club, which began to grow. The club spent hours in prayer and worship daily, communed weekly, fasted twice a week, and visited and ministered to prisoners. The club's practices gained notoriety, if primarily negative. At this time, Wesley and his companions became known as "Methodists."

The church appointed Wesley to the parish in Savannah, Georgia, and on the journey by sea, his ship encountered a terrible storm. While Wesley panicked, he observed a group of German Moravians calmly praying and singing hymns.

The Germans calmly sung on. I asked one of them afterwards, "Was you not afraid?" He answered, "I thank God, no." I asked, "But were not your women and children afraid?" He replied mildly, "No; our women and children are not afraid to die." From them I went to their crying, trembling neighbors, and pointed out to them the difference, in the hour of trial, between him that feareth God, and him that feareth him not.²⁴

This moment was critical for Wesley as he realized that while he was the ship's chaplain, his primary concern during the storm was his safety. This realization, along with witnessing the inspiring faith of the Moravians, led Wesley to question whether his faith was as strong as he initially thought. Unfortunately, Savannah was another ministry

²³ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 42.

²⁴ John Wesley, *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal* (London, United Kingdom: Printed for G. Whitfield, City-Road, 1797), 22.

opportunity cut short for Wesley due to a failed romance that impeded his ministry, and he returned to England in just two years.

In England, Wesley sought the Moravians to help him improve his faith. At their meeting at Aldersgate Street, London, Wesley heard Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans being read and experienced his heart "strangely warmed."²⁵ For Wesley, this was an actual conversion experience unheard of in Anglicanism. The Anglican church taught that a conversion experience was unnecessary for the baptized. Regardless, the moment was an important milestone in Wesley's life that marked a turning point for his ministry.

It is difficult to overestimate the influence the Moravians had on Wesley. He even traveled to Herrnhut to study and returned with ideas for "bands" or "societies," which were small groups modeled after the Moravian "choirs." Had it not been for the Moravians' policy of quietism, the practice of passively waiting until one receives the gift of faith, and his deep loyalty to Anglicanism, Wesley would have most likely joined the Moravians. Nevertheless, he remained a loyal Anglican until his death.

Though Wesley loved the Anglicans, they did not always return his love. The Anglicans believed he was crossing boundaries where he had no authority, while "Wesley felt that his calling as well as his ordination made it necessary for him to disregard parish boundaries and normal parish protocol in his attempts to fulfill God's commission to him to preach the gospel. It was the basic rationale that would undergird Methodist itinerancy: God determines the scope of mission and preaching."²⁶

²⁵ Wesley, *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal*, 105.

²⁶ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 97.

Because of his pious practices and his divergent view of authority for preaching, Wesley experienced occasional violent persecution, and some churches barred him from preaching. It was amid such trials that Wesley made profound strides in lay empowerment. Because there was a greater demand for pastors than the Anglicans could supply, Wesley began a program of lay preachers whom Wesley authorized to preach and perform pastoral duties in places where no priests were available. The ministry of these lay men and women was critical to the growth of Methodism.

Wesley was tireless in this work. In addition to traveling and preaching extensively, he created a system of organization for his societies, missions, and evangelical efforts that are still in use today, albeit with changes. The name “Methodist” is apt for a movement begun by one with such a methodical and systematic way of thinking. Wesley employed his organizational gifts to develop a system of theology, including his famous “Quadrilateral,” though Wesley never referred to it by that name.

The quietism that repelled Wesley from the Moravians, he would never embrace. He worked to abolish slavery, encouraged temperance, supported schools and orphanages, and even made strides toward feminism by advocating for women lay preachers. Wesley’s enduring impact is his movement that became the Methodist church, the largest and farthest-reaching Pietist movement.

Experience of the Laity

Given that Pietism inspired and empowered lay persons for ministry, the question that needs answering is, “Did understanding the significance of their ministry better position the laity for an experience of the Holy Spirit?” Spener’s Lutheran piety did not

produce lay missionaries as did the Moravians, nor lay preachers as did the Methodists. However, an excellent example of a Lutheran layperson empowered and inspired for ministry is found in Count Zinzendorf.

Though rightly considered the founder of the Moravian movement, Zinzendorf remained loyal to his Lutheran faith throughout his life. Eventually, the church would ordain Zinzendorf as a public minister, but before his ordination, he spent many years preaching, writing, leading bible studies, evangelizing through Europe, and organizing and administrating the Moravian movement.

His duties as Count kept Zinzendorf from pursuing ordained ministry, but his ministry as a lay person was not without preparation. Raised by a pietist family and disciplined by Francke at Halle, not only was Zinzendorf taught the Bible and theology, his affluence afforded him many opportunities to interact with faith leaders and ministers of his day. Having practiced his faith from childhood, Zinzendorf knew the significance of ministry and was positioned to experience the Holy Spirit as he served God throughout his life.

Zinzendorf once wrote about missions: “A missionary seeks nothing else day and night but that the heathen find joy in their savior, and that the savior find joy in the heathen.”²⁷ This statement clarifies that Zinzendorf associated mission work with a spiritual experience of joy. He believed one found joy in each facet of the missionary enterprise. Zinzendorf must have experienced the Holy Spirit in new ways through his ministry because he never tired of it and was drawn deeper into it until his death. His

²⁷ Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 229.

ministry perseverance alone is evidence that his ministry endeavors positioned him to experience the Holy Spirit more robustly.

As Lutherans could not bring it to fruition, it was left to the Moravian movement to produce the first Protestant lay missionaries. Zinzendorf took it upon himself to train the missionaries to conduct their work. His was a three-fold approach: 1) live humbly among the people. 2) preach the crucified Christ primarily. 3) focus on individuals rather than entire communities. One of the first Moravian lay persons trained by Zinzendorf to be sent into the mission field was Matthaus Stach, who volunteered for service among the Inuit natives in Greenland. Stach's adventure was harrowing for many reasons. He did not speak the native language nor understand the Inuit culture, and he was not accustomed to the harsh climate in which he would be living and working. Stach and his fellow missionaries, also trained by Zinzendorf, encountered one disaster after another for the first several years of their mission, bearing little fruit.

It is difficult to imagine that Stach took joy in this torturous endeavor. There are no records of Stach's feelings about his missionary efforts. Moravians allowed missionaries to keep diaries but left them purposefully unpublished in the act of misguided humility not to glorify these persons. Fortunately, some of these diaries were preserved. A diary entry from John Beck, one of Stach's fellow missionaries, recorded the story of an Inuit man's conversion:

As soon as he had finished, one of the Greenlanders, named Kajarnak, stepped up to the table, and said with great earnestness, “How was that? O tell me that once more, for I would fain to be saved too!” “These words,” says the missionary “The like of which I had never heard from a Greenlander before, melted my heart, and made my eyes overflow with joyful tears, while I related the history of the Savior’s life and death and strove to explain to my hearers the way of salvation by faith in him.”²⁸

In his writing, Beck gives us a glimpse into his experience of the Holy Spirit as he shared the gospel with the Inuit. Though much of his tale is of frustration and long-suffering, this portion is full of joy because Beck understood the significance of his ministry with these native people. Indeed, more joyful moments like these were experienced if not recorded.

Though not possible without the work of the missionaries, native converts often became the most potent and effective ministers of the gospel to their people. These new Christians were not theologically trained clergy but found inroads with people through shared language, culture, and experience. Whereas the natives perceived the missionaries as superior or alien to the natives, their Greenlander brethren and sistren were received as equals they could relate to more fully.

More than a few converts, such as Kajarnak, dedicated their lives to ministry to and among their own. Though little is written, the record of their lives shows they derived purpose, contentment, and joy from their witness. Kajarnak was willing to sacrifice much to participate in the ministry. The following account is of the moment when Kajarnak forsook his people to live among the missionaries:

²⁸ Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (Great Britain), Committee of General Literature and Education, *Lives of Missionaries, Greenland: Hans Egede; Matthew Stach and His Associates* (London, United Kingdom: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1860), 132-133, https://archive.org/details/livesofmissionar00soci_0/page/132/mode/2up.

They did their utmost to persuade Kajarnak to depart with them, representing in strong terms the difficulties he would have to encounter, and contrasting the restraints imposed on him by his new associates and pursuits, with the wild unbounded freedom of native life. Their arguments had no effect, for he had found a prize, for the sake of which he was willing to endure greater trials than any which his companions had suggested. By the desertion of his partners, Kajarnak was deprived of the large boat, tent, and other possessions in which he had an equal share with themselves, and was reduced for a time to great straits; but he bore the loss patiently.²⁹

Kajarnak's experience of the Holy Spirit, which he found in the gospel, and his commitment to sharing it with his fellow Inuit far outweighed any hardship he endured. As a result, Kajarnak stayed with the missionaries until his death and fortified their ministry.

Kajarnak's words and silent eloquence of his blameless life had produced a far greater effect than he was aware of. Between three and four hundred persons eventually forsook their homes in the South, to place themselves under the instruction of the missionaries, who attributed to the words and example of Kajarnak their first desire to be taught the way of salvation.³⁰

The record shows clear facts rather than emotional accounts of Stach's work. Despite all the factors against him, Stach served in Greenland for thirty-eight years. Knowing the significance of his ministry, he was not repelled from it but drawn more deeply into it, eventually becoming ordained. A year after returning to Germany from Greenland, Stach accepted another call to North Carolina, where he and his wife operated a boys' school until his death. A look at his life provides evidence of the endurance, joy, purpose, and contentment provided to him by the Holy Spirit throughout his ministry service.

²⁹ Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (Great Britain), Committee of General Literature and Education, *Lives of Missionaries, Greenland*, 136.

³⁰ Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (Great Britain), Committee of General Literature and Education, *Lives of Missionaries, Greenland*, 146.

Within Methodism, lay preaching was one of the most common avenues for lay empowerment. Extraordinarily progressive for his day, Wesley welcomed women and men to be lay preachers. His upbringing no doubt contributed to his progressive thinking regarding women in ministry. Wesley's mother, Susanna, was firm and expected much of her children. She was also countercultural in that she insisted that her daughters learn to read as well as her sons. Heitzenrater notes this: "he was the only boy at home with four or five sisters until he was four and his little brother Charles was born. Given this context for rearing, John's later eagerness to accept the leadership abilities of women is...understandable."³¹

One lay woman in whom Wesley recognized a particular gift for preaching was Sarah Mallett. Sarah was from a working-class family and received no formal theological education. Her preparation for ministry took the form of participation in the local Methodist society and her proximity to a Methodist class leader, her uncle, with whom she lived. Wesley endorsed Mallett, and she became an immensely popular lay preacher during her day. Fortunately, Sarah left a diary of her experiences. In the following passage by Mallett's biographer, David East, he explains how her experience of the Holy Spirit, explicitly derived from the call to ministry, brought her peace and joy despite her usual melancholy with life. Note that her faith alone did not provide her with the same experience of the Holy Spirit:

³¹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 34.

However, far from finding comfort in God, religion appears to have depressed her: she had trouble sleeping, and often spent the night weeping. She was tearful in the daytime too, so that ‘Some thought I was going melancholy.’ However, one night she had a revelation of God, and “In a moment all my sorrow was turned into joy, and I knew I was made to love and serve God.”³²

Sarah battled depression throughout her life, and those moments of exercising her ministry appear to provide periods of relief and peace, both of which were difficult for her to obtain. She wrote: “In the beginning of July, I was invited to a place six miles from *Stratton*. Believing it to be a call from God, I went, after crying mightily to Him for help. I found much liberty in speaking, and a great blessing to my own soul.”³³ Liberty and blessing were her experiences of the Holy Spirit due to understanding and embodying the significance of her ministry. Like the other lay ministers studied here, Sarah continued serving in ministry until her death, preaching for fifty-eight years.

Knowing their ministry’s significance better positioned Zinzendorf, Stach, and Mallet to experience the Holy Spirit as they ministered. Living within a pietist context, all three were immersed daily in the significance of their ministry. Had they been denied the opportunity to perform significant ministry because of their lay status, they certainly would not have experienced the Holy Spirit as profoundly as they did. These three lay ministers provide perfect examples of the robust experience of the Holy Spirit God positions lay persons to receive when engaged in significant ministry.

³² David East, *My Dear Sally: The Life of Sarah Mallet, One of John Wesley’s Preachers* (Elmsworth, United Kingdom: W.M.H.S. Publications, 2003), 7, <https://www.amazon.com/My-Dear-Sally-Wesleys-preachers-ebook/dp/B00I1HPHDE?asin=B00I1HPHDE&revisionId=&format=2&depth=1>.

³³ William Mallitt, “An Account of Sarah Mallett,” *Eighteenth Century Religion, Literature, and Culture*, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://18thcenturyculture.wordpress.com/primary-sources/the-armenian-magazine/an-account-of-sarah-mallett/>.

Conclusion

When people know the spiritual significance of their ministry, they are better positioned to experience the Holy Spirit when they perform it. This chapter has provided numerous examples of lay persons who experienced the Holy Spirit from doing significant ministry. Unfortunately, for the sake of good order and to preserve pure doctrine, the church, throughout history, has kept structures in place to regulate who has authority to minister, especially in the public sphere. As a result, there have been remarkably few strides in lay empowerment for a movement over two millennia. The one period in the church's history that stands as an exception is the Pietist era of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This fact makes the Pietist era ideal for the historical foundation of this project.

Pietism empowered lay persons to practice forms of ministry otherwise reserved for theologically trained clergy. This era produced many examples of lay men and women who knew the significance of their ministry and, therefore, took extraordinary risks for ministry, faced seemingly insurmountable challenges, endured, and grew in faith. They experienced the Holy Spirit in new and different ways than before ministry. These experiences led lay people deeper into ministry, so they continued ministry until their deaths.

It appears evident that these lay ministers of the Pietist era were, through significant ministry, better positioned to experience the Holy Spirit. They grew more confident and competent in their ministry and found contentment and sometimes release from their afflictions as they rendered their service. The Church should learn from these

faithful servants of Jesus Christ. Their stories are a foundation upon which the church of today can continue the work of lay empowerment so that the laity will experience the Holy Spirit in a new way.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Historically, the Church has perceived the Eucharist, or Communion, as a great mystery. The sacrament is God's work, administered by humans, in which common elements of bread and wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ. When Christians receive and consume these elements in faith, they also obtain forgiveness, life, and salvation. For such things to happen, the Holy Spirit must be at work, empowering and guiding the entire event in a flurry of activity. In liturgical churches, the Eucharist is the climax of worship, eclipsing even the sermon regarding salvific content. As it is so crucial, many churches take pains to extend the Eucharist from the worship assembly to those sick and shut-in members who cannot join the gathering. To accomplish this ministry, lay leaders volunteer to make Communion visits. In so doing, they become conduits of the Holy Spirit's power. How do they experience the Holy Spirit working in and through them?

The theological theme that best relates to this project is eucharistic pneumatology. Pneumatology is theology concerned with the Holy Spirit, both person and work. Eucharistic pneumatology examines the Holy Spirit's work within the context of Holy Communion and why that work matters. Because various traditions within the Christian faith interpret Holy Communion in differing ways, this study reflects the Lutheran expression of the sacrament.

This theological foundation begins with an overview of the Holy Spirit's work as understood in historic orthodox Christianity. Following this overview is an investigation of the Biblical roots of eucharistic pneumatology. What follows is the establishment of universal pneumatology in the ecumenical creeds. Next, the project's context demands an assessment of Lutheran pneumatology as expressed in the Lutheran Confessions, particularly in the Augsburg Confession (1530). Martin Luther's core writings on Holy Communion in his Small Catechism (1529) and *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) provide a basis for developing the Confessions. Next, exploring Helmut Thielicke's work gives a modern Lutheran systematic interpretation of eucharistic pneumatology. Next, Lutheran liturgist Frank Senn's recent work on the sacrament, the standard textbook for worship in ELCA seminaries, is examined. Finally, essential contributions from leading contemporary theologians traversing the denominational spectrum, including Steven Jack Land (Pentecostal), Yves Congar (Catholic), and Ephraim Radner (Anglican), will yield theological contrasts to test and challenge the Lutheran perspective of the context.

Overview

The Holy Spirit is a person of the triune God. The Hebrew Scriptures frequently mention the "spirit of God," but the phrase does not explicitly refer to a person but rather the presence of God. Usage of the word "Spirit" increases exponentially in the New Testament, from 75 times to 275 times, even though it is a much shorter body of work. How "Spirit" is used is also different in the New Testament. The name is often used in a formula where Father, Son, and Spirit have separate personhoods. Though the word

“Trinity” is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament, Christian theologians developed the concept early enough that scholars find evidence of it from the first century. However, it was centuries before the Western Church codified its understanding of the Trinity in the Athanasian Creed. With the person of Jesus being the primary focus of the Nicene Creed, the Spirit was the last person of the Trinity to receive a close examination. Early manuscripts of the Nicene Creed (325) conclude with “I believe in the Holy Spirit” without any further description included.

The Bible

The Holy Spirit is active throughout the entire narrative in the Christian Scriptures. Beginning at Creation, the Spirit swept over the primordial waters (Genesis 1:2). When God’s people formed a society, the Spirit’s presence rested on their kings (1 Samuel 10:6). When that society proved unfaithful to God, the Spirit spoke through the prophets to call them back to obedience (Isaiah 61:1).

In the New Testament, the Spirit conceived Jesus with the virgin Mary (Luke 1:35). When God formed the church, the Spirit fortified her with gifts (1 Corinthians 12) and fruit (Galatians 5). Finally, at Pentecost, God poured his Spirit upon all believers (Acts 2:4).

Throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit accomplishes God’s work among humans. This fact provides a biblical basis, which encompasses the entire biblical narrative, for the Church’s theology that Communion is one of the ways the Spirit accomplishes God’s work in the Church.

Creeds

The Holy Spirit is sometimes called the third person of the Triune God. “Third” does not imply a hierarchy; as the Athanasian Creed declares, “the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, co-eternal in majesty.”¹ The Apostles’ Creed only spares two verses on the Holy Spirit to tell us that the Spirit conceived Jesus Christ with the Virgin Mary and that the Church believes in the Holy Spirit.²

Though sparse, these first creedal statements about the Spirit explain a significant role of the third person of the Trinity, that of one who brings about life, in this case, the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Though the Apostles’ Creed does not often mention the Spirit, the entire third article relates to the Spirit. Therefore, the universal church, communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the dead, and eternal life were, for the writers of the Creed, under the jurisdiction of the Spirit.

Though brief, the Apostles’ Creed informs eucharistic pneumatology in its insistence that the Spirit works life, forgives sins, and remains eternally active in the Church. Additionally, since the Spirit resurrects the dead and enables eternal life, two actions that defy mortal possibilities, the Creed suggests the Spirit defeats impossibilities in the lives of Christians. Given that the Spirit does these things, the Spirit might do them in the context of Communion.

The third article of the Nicene Creed (381) states that Christians “believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the

¹ Athanasian Creed

² Apostles’ Creed

prophets.”³ Again, the church confesses that the Holy Spirit works life. This work appears to take precedence above all other work.

The other named occupation of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the Creed is speaking through prophets, which the Bible observes. Because the Nicene Creed’s (381) third article contains the same statements as the Apostles’ Creed, it reaffirms that the Spirit administers the church, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the dead, and eternal life. Thus, the Nicene Creed (381) supports the assertions of the Apostles’ Creed.

The Athanasian Creed, authoritative in the Western Church, offers little added information about the Spirit but is primarily concerned with its central idea that the three persons of God are co-equal and co-eternal. However, there is one statement of particular interest regarding the Spirit:

The Father was neither made
nor created nor begotten;
the Son was neither made nor created,
but was alone begotten of the Father;
the Spirit was neither made nor created,
but is proceeding from the Father and the Son⁴

How each person of God came into existence mirrors the trinitarian concept, different but not greater or lesser. The Father was, the Son was begotten, and the Spirit is proceeding. What is most interesting is that, for the Spirit, the verb tense is unique in that it is the only one taking place in the present, as if the Spirit is still proceeding. This present verb tense is important for eucharistic pneumatology as it infers that the actions of the Spirit in the Eucharist are perpetually fresh and new.

³ Nicene Creed (381)

⁴ Athanasian Creed

Luther on the Spirit

The Holy Spirit was indispensable for Luther's primary theses of justification by faith apart from works. In his explanation of the third article of the Apostle's Creed, Luther wrote, "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith."⁵ Since grace is at the heart of the gospel for Luther, the Holy Spirit, as initiator and provider of that grace, plays the central role in God's act of salvation.

Just as the Athanasian Creed observed, Luther also believed the Holy Spirit is dynamically active in the lives of Christians. "Daily in this Christian church the Holy Spirit abundantly forgives all sins—mine and those of all believers. On the last day the Holy Spirit will raise me and all the dead and will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life."⁶ Luther subscribed to the teachings of the three ecumenical creeds that working life is the Spirit's priority.

Luther pointed to the Words of Institution regarding the Spirit's work in Holy Communion. For Luther, the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, works through these words. He wrote, "forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation."⁷ The Holy Spirit is the giver of what is given through the sacraments. Word and sacrament are instruments of the Holy Spirit for accomplishing God's purposes within the church.

⁵ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 355.

⁶ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 356.

⁷ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 362.

The instruments are called means of grace and include both Word and Sacrament. As Luther strongly identified the Spirit with the Word, he also identified the sacraments with the Spirit.

Luther introduced new ways of thinking about the Eucharist that were, and still are, at odds with the Catholic understanding. First, Luther taught, against the norm of his time, that the Spirit intends the laity to receive Communion in both kinds, bread and wine. Typical of Luther, he used Scripture for his proofs. “Both (Gospels of Matthew and Mark) attach the note of universality to the cup, not to the bread, as though the Spirit foresaw this schism, by which some would be forbidden to partake of the cup, which Christ desired should be common to all.”⁸ If withholding the cup by the church was a move of power to oppress the laity and reinforce the church’s authority, Luther must have seen the Spirit as a leveling force working toward a more egalitarian Communion practice.

Luther saw the Spirit’s role in Communion differently than the implicit doctrine of the Catholic church’s practice of Communion. For Luther, Communion’s efficacy does not rely upon the Spirit’s special anointing of priests so they can conjure a transformation of the elements. Instead, the communicant needs only to trust Christ’s words of institution for the sacrament to be efficacious. He wrote, “nothing else is needed for a worthy holding of mass than a faith that relies confidently on this promise, believes Christ to be true in these words of his, and does not doubt that these infinite blessings

⁸ Martin Luther and William R. Russell, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*. 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 201.

have been bestowed upon it.”⁹ For Luther, Jesus made the promises “this is my body” (Matthew 26:26) and “this is my blood,” (Matthew 26:28). Hence, all communicants must do is trust those promises. Of course, for Luther, the ability to trust these promises is only available through the gift of the Spirit.

Finally, Luther was vehemently opposed to the church’s teaching that mass, which includes Communion, is another church work that makes it efficacious. The work by which Communion is made effective is done solely by the Holy Spirit. “When we ought to be grateful for benefits received, we come arrogantly to give that which we ought to take. With unheard-of perversity we mock the mercy of the giver by giving as a work the thing we receive as a gift so that the testator, instead of being a dispenser of his own goods, becomes the recipient of ours. Woe to such sacrilege!”¹⁰

Turning what God does in worship into a salvific work of the church contradicts Luther’s message. The message that remained consistent for Luther is that the sacraments are a means of grace, along with the Word, by which the Holy Spirit brings the gifts of Jesus Christ to the church.

Modern Lutheran Voices

Helmut Thielicke, the famous twentieth-century German Lutheran pastor and theologian, wrote a volume on pneumatology as the third part of his systematic work entitled “The Evangelical Faith.” In it, he explores eucharistic pneumatology extensively.

⁹ Luther and Russell, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 213.

¹⁰ Luther and Russell, *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, 218.

This work of Thieliicke's is vital as he systematized Luther's theology, which Luther never organized and has been criticized for being erratic.

To begin with, Thieliicke identified the Holy Spirit with the Word. "The Word and the Spirit may be distinguished but not separated. The Spirit is concealed in the letter of the Word. The Word contains the Spirit."¹¹ Identifying the Spirit and the Word is pivotal for Lutheran eucharistic pneumatology. Luther repeatedly stated that the Word's connection to the action and the elements is paramount in the Eucharist. Thieliicke concurred: "In the eucharist as in baptism the important thing is the primacy of the Word which sustains the action, embodies itself in it, and awakens faith through the Pneuma."¹² This Word exists as both law and gospel (command and promise), which Jesus spoke in his words of institution. Famously, Luther fixated on the "is" in Jesus' "This is my body. This is my blood." When Luther met and conversed with Zwingli at the Marburg Colloquy (1529) to unite Protestants, the "is" defined the point with which Luther could not compromise. Though almost certainly a legend, it was reported that when Zwingli argued Jesus was speaking metaphorically about the bread and wine of the sacrament being his body and blood, Luther wrote, "This is my body." on the table and walked out. However, Thieliicke clarified that Luther never intended for the "is" to be confused as the totality of the Word. "For the Word that has the primacy is not the literal "is" but the efficacious Word, sustained by the Pneuma in which the present Christ meets us, which

¹¹ Helmut Thieliicke and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The Evangelical Faith*. Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 94.

¹² Thieliicke and Bromiley, *The Evangelical Faith*, 284.

declares the forgiveness of sins, and which gives us the promise of the coming feast in the kingdom of God.”¹³

There are present and future implications in Communion. As one receives Communion, Christ is present in faith, giving forgiveness, life, and salvation through the Holy Spirit. Simultaneously, receiving the body and blood unites the communicant with the whole church on both sides of the grave. Receiving the elements then brings with it an affirmation of the life that is to come under God’s reign. Thielicke stated, “bread and wine both represent the same thing, i.e., table fellowship with the dying and returning Lord.”¹⁴ In its original context, Jesus instituted the Supper as he anticipated his death and resurrection. Often, sick-and-shut-in communicants anticipate the same things – death and resurrection. The Spirit works in Communion to remind and assure communicants that Jesus is present and will continue to be with them as they journey toward those unfamiliar places.

In the meantime, all Christians live in a time of tension between the inauguration of God’s reign and its fulfillment, but God’s rule is not yet in full effect. The Holy Spirit fills the gap in this trying interval. “The ministry of the Holy Spirit suggests this interim, for, as we have seen, he is the deposit or first installment of what is to come.”¹⁵ The interim is the present time that belongs to a new age that has not fully materialized. A critical way the Holy Spirit works in the interim is through the sacraments. Baptism

¹³ Thielicke and Bromiley, *The Evangelical Faith*, 284.

¹⁴ Thielicke and Bromiley, *The Evangelical Faith*, 287.

¹⁵ Thielicke and Bromiley, *The Evangelical Faith*, 288.

makes people citizens of the coming Kingdom, and Communion nourishes them for living in it.

Thielicke affirmed Luther's assertion that Christ's real presence is fundamental to Holy Communion and pointed out that the Spirit makes Christ's presence possible. In the Pentecost event (Acts 2), Christ remains present with Christians through the work of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, Christ comes down to Christians by the Word and Spirit through the bread and wine in Communion. Additionally, beyond the context of Holy Communion, Christ is present in the lives of Christians. Jesus promised his disciples that he would be "with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20), and the Holy Spirit keeps that promise.

Lutheran liturgist Frank Senn is currently the ELCA's foremost authority on worship. He expresses robust eucharistic pneumatology for today. "What is initiated in Holy Baptism by water and the Spirit is brought to full expression in Holy Communion. The church is formed into the body of Christ in the world by sharing together (Koinonia) the body of Christ in the sacramental meal."¹⁶ Whereas some Christian traditions emphasize Baptism to the exclusion of Communion, Senn asserts that Communion enhances Baptism. Receiving Communion allows the Holy Spirit to shape Christians into the "form" of Christ. The "form" in which the Spirit shapes Christians is inward rather than outward, representing their passions and priorities. This fact does not imply that the outward physical form is not essential for Christians. For Senn, the Spirit is not resigned to the spiritual arena alone; the Spirit also works on the body.

¹⁶ Frank C. Senn, *Eucharistic Body* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 90.

The work of the spirit in, with, and through the sacraments is not just spiritual; It is incarnational. The spirit gives us faith to discern all the bodies - the body of Christ in the sacrament, the body of Christ in the individual bodies that received the sacramental body, and the social body of the church that is formed by sharing together in the sacramental body. The spirit is the energy that causes the social and individual bodies of Christ to go from the eucharistic assembly, fueled by the sacramental body and blood of Christ, to erect signs of the Kingdom of God by caring for bodies in need of food, clothing, shelter, healing, and loving care.”¹⁷

Senn’s point is that body and spirit are both arenas of work for the Holy Spirit, and attempting to confine the Spirit to one or the other is impossible and enigmatic of a false dichotomy. Christianity maintains a high view of physical bodies, making its goal the material and spiritual resurrection of all God’s creation.

Contrasting Perspectives

Perspectives on the person and work of the Holy Spirit are many and varied within Christianity. That the person of the Holy Spirit remains a mystery for Christians is undeniable. However, examining diverse perspectives allows for a multifaceted view of the mysterious Spirit. The task of theology requires one to say something, even if what one says is incomplete. Therefore, listening to the different voices of faith teachers is a good starting point for exploring pneumatology.

Pentecostal Voice

Pentecostal Christians have always paid particular attention to the work of the Holy Spirit as it is an immediately observable phenomenon in their lives and gatherings. An influential Pentecostal theologian and president of his denomination’s Pentecostal

¹⁷ Senn, *Eucharistic Body*, 100.

Theological Seminary, Steven Jack Land, wrote, “the Holy Spirit brings the life of the kingdom of God into the present.”¹⁸

For Pentecostal Christians, theology cannot be simply an affair of the mind or heart; one experiences theology as a living reality. Land qualifies this brand of theology: “theology, for Pentecostals, is a discerning reflection by the eschatological missionary community upon lived reality.”¹⁹ Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians experience signs and wonders as a “down payment”²⁰ of what is to come in full at Jesus’ return. One cannot overstate the palpable expectation of the imminent Parousia within this theology.

All Christians acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit, though often undetectable to them. However, that work is considered primarily concrete and visible for Pentecostals. The substantial experience of the Holy Spirit by Pentecostals, they call “Spirit baptism,” is regarded as fundamental to salvation as justification and sanctification.

With the emphasis placed on the concrete and visible work of the Holy Spirit, it is ironic that the sacraments, particularly Holy Communion, are mostly downplayed in the Pentecostal tradition. In Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit delivers the presence of Jesus Christ in an entirely tangible way. The communicant can see, feel, smell, and taste Jesus’ presence in the sacrament.

¹⁸ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 222.

¹⁹ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 192.

²⁰ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 60.

Land, an essential spokesperson for his denomination, says much about the Pentecostal view of Holy Communion by saying so little about it in his Pentecostal dogmatics: *Pentecostal Spirituality*. In slightly more than two pages, dominated by the lyrics of a hymn, Land acknowledges the real presence of Christ in Communion made possible by the Holy Spirit.²¹ However, he also states that Communion is not essential; instead, “The Lord’s Supper was important because Jesus was present keeping the Passover and promising the Parousia in the Holy Spirit.”²² Again, the future orientation of Pentecostals is affirmed by this statement. Land’s is an honest evaluation of his denomination’s anemic commitment to Communion.

Some Pentecostal theologians disagree with Land about Communion’s importance. For example, professor and author Daniel Tomberlin wrote, “sacramental worship is essential to Pentecostal spirituality.”²³ Likewise, Pastor and theologian Luke Geraty hosts the podcast *Sacramental Charismatic*, in which he stated, “I have found, in my own experience, that the intersection between pneumatology, ecclesiology, and missiology leads to a sacramental approach.”²⁴ His podcast centers around the topic of beneficial sacramentality within a charismatic context. These and others are now working against the tide of their tradition to recover and elevate their appreciation of the sacraments.

²¹ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 115.

²² Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 116.

²³ Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary, 2010), XI.

²⁴ Luke Geraty, “Introducing the Sacramental Charismatic Podcast,” In *Sacramental Charismatic*, podcast audio, April 21, 2020, <https://sacramentalcharismatic.podbean.com/page/3/>.

Within the Catholic tradition, Cardinal Yves Congar's work throughout the twentieth century did much to recover the Holy Spirit's proper co-equal role in the Trinity. Engaging the teachings of the patristics and the Bible, Congar's pneumatology is a retrieval of the historical theology of the Spirit rather than an original work with radical themes. His strategy was one of incorporation in that his work better incorporates the Holy Spirit into the theological arenas of Anthropology, Christology, and Ecclesiology.

Christian unity was a lifelong passion of Congar's; one cannot overstate his debt to Eastern Christianity in defining his pneumatology. He concluded that different traditions' understanding of the Holy Spirit could be the same, yet their expressions differ. Raising hackles in his tradition, in addition to his commitment to ecumenism, Congar taught that while the Spirit was indeed present and at work in the church, the Spirit was not at work only in the church.

Following Irenaeus' lead, Congar asserted that Jesus and the Spirit were the "two hands of God"²⁵ used to bring people to Godself. Nowhere is this displayed more clearly than in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Congar married the thought of Eastern and Western Christianity by emphasizing the Words of Institution and the Epiclesis, a prayer invoking the Spirit in Communion. He reasoned that Holy Communion is not only Christological but also Pneumatological.²⁶ In his view, those two categories can not exist apart. What Jesus instituted, the Spirit brings to fruition.

²⁵ Yves Congar, *Word and Spirit* (London, United Kingdom: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 25.

²⁶ Yves Congar and David Smith, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit: 'He Is Lord and Giver of Life'* (London, United Kingdom: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 234.

Author and Professor of Historical Theology Ephraim Radner challenges the popular pneumatological conclusion that the Holy Spirit's primary role is to make people happy with their lives. Radner begins with the premise that post-fall humanity is characterized by mortality, vulnerability, and, therefore, the inevitability of suffering. The Holy Spirit's role, Radner asserts, is not to shield humans from suffering but to enable them to follow Jesus through their suffering, thus preserving their creatureliness.²⁷ "Creatureliness" describes the quality of beings created by God. For one's creatureliness to be maintained, one must experience the world as God intends. Though the Holy Spirit does not cause suffering, the Spirit uses suffering to help Christians better identify with Jesus Christ.

Living in the world is often challenging and sometimes dangerous, so God gives the Spirit to creatures to guide and empower them. Radner's conclusions are not a radical departure from orthodox Christianity but a rejection of heretical pop theology, which emphasizes the self-serving benefits of the Christian faith. The rejection is crucial to maintaining a pneumatology that faithfully attests to the God of Judeo-Christian scriptures, who is the subject, rather than the object, of all experiences. Radner steers Christians away from an easy and formulaic faith and back to a complex faith that remains honest and transparent regarding its challenges.

²⁷ Ephraim Radner, *A Profound Ignorance: Modern Pneumatology and Its Anti-Modern Redemption* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).

Reassessment

In Holy Communion, the Holy Spirit brings the real presence of Jesus to the communicant in a uniquely personal way. Christians of all traditions concede that, through the Holy Spirit, God is eternally and constantly active in the world. In the Eucharist, God is concretely at work in the communicant.

When distributing the consecrated elements, the minister says to the communicant, “The body of Christ, given for you,” then gives the bread, and “The blood of Christ, shed for you,” then gives the wine. This message is even more profound when delivered in the context of a corporate worship experience. There is no other point in the Lutheran liturgy when the minister looks at an individual and relays the gospel to them in such a personal way. God loves the world and is active in it, but in Holy Communion, the message is that God loves that communicant (in particular) and works in that communicant (in particular).

Assessing the Spirit

Indeed, human expectation or convention does not bind the Holy Spirit’s work. However, one must develop criteria to faithfully discern how the Spirit’s actions manifest in those who minister. These criteria find their support from the Bible, the Lutheran Confessions, and the faith community. The work of the Spirit around the sacrament of Holy Communion is pertinent to this project’s research. It is helpful to examine these authoritative sources to develop criteria for the Holy Spirit’s work in Communion.

Biblical

Luther, who identified the Word with the Holy Spirit, wrote, “Holy Scripture is God’s Word written and, as I might say, put in letters, for as Christ is held and handled in the world, so it is with God’s written Word.”²⁸ As the Word contains the Spirit, Scripture is the chief means of assessing the Spirit’s work in Communion.

In Matthew’s account of the institution of Holy Communion, Jesus states that the cup contains “my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:28). The forgiveness of sins, or sanctification, is a work regularly attributed to the Holy Spirit throughout the New Testament.

In Mark’s account, Jesus declares, “I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” (Mark 14:25). The Holy Spirit joins Christians to Jesus Christ through faith. At all times, Christians are joined to Jesus spiritually, but in Holy Communion, they are also joined physically by consuming the elements. Holy Communion creates a place where the kingdom of God breaks in on the kingdom of the world in a uniquely tangible way. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to experience this.

One can only find a report of the resurrected Jesus alluding to the Eucharist in Luke’s Gospel. After a journey with two of his followers from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Jesus, still unrecognized by his companions, “took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.” (Luke 24:30-31). These two followers receive faith in Jesus’ resurrection within this Eucharistic allusion.

²⁸ Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, Germany: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 2009), 48: 31, quoted in Helmut Thielicke and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The Evangelical Faith*. Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 94.

Up to this point, they could not believe God raised Jesus from the dead despite evidence he had.

In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as "the living bread that came down from heaven." He then makes the promise that "Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." (John 6:51). Salvation, which for John means a life in relationship to Jesus that begins at the moment of faith and extends throughout eternity, is the gift offered through Holy Communion.

The Apostle Paul marries the concept of Christian community with the Eucharist. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:17). For Paul, Holy Communion gathers and binds all Christians, living and dead, together so that they become one. He goes on to say that sharing Communion forms such strong bonds that if one Christian mistreats another before partaking the meal, the offender will bring judgment on themselves when consuming the sacrament.

Thus, the Bible attests that the Holy Spirit, in the context of Holy Communion, forgives sins, brings the Kingdom, creates and renews faith, gives eternal life, and binds all Christians together - both living and dead. Therefore, these are essential criteria for assessing the Spirit's work in Communion.

Lutheran Tradition

The Augsburg Confession proposes that Jesus does all his post-ascension work before the Parousia through the Holy Spirit. It states that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, does "make holy, purify, strengthen, and comfort all who believe in him, also distribute

to them life and various gifts and benefits, and shield and protect them against the devil and sin.”²⁹ Like Luther, the Augsburg Confession also asserts that the Holy Spirit works faith through the means of grace. Through the proclamation of the gospel and administering sacraments, God “gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith.”³⁰

Faith given by the Holy Spirit receives the sacraments, which “awaken and strengthen”³¹ that very faith. As receiving Communion is obedience to Jesus’ command, the Confession contends that faithful obedience to such a divine command can only exist through the Holy Spirit.³² The Spirit moves the heart to do good works.³³ The reformers point out that such good works are a product of salvation rather than a requirement. In addition to criteria suggested by the Bible, the Confessions add comforting, gifting, protecting, and enabling obedience to God as criteria by which one may assess the work of the Spirit in Communion.

Pastoral Authority

Discernment of the Holy Spirit’s work is not confined only to biblical proofs and confessional texts. Ongoing discernment takes place in the context of the faith community. While “All baptized Christians are called to share in Christ’s ministry of love

²⁹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 38.

³⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 40.

³¹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 46.

³² Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 52.

³³ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 56.

and service in the world.”³⁴, the pastor is charged with public ministry leadership, including preaching the word and administering sacraments within a designated faith community. The call to ministry by the church to a pastor is also God’s call. The Holy Spirit makes pastors the “guardians” of their “flocks.” (Acts 20:28). God and the Church place authority for spiritual discernment upon pastors, especially within the parish they serve. Under their call, pastors may also suggest criteria for assessing the Spirit’s work, testing their discernment against scripture and tradition.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit is dynamically at work in Communion. When lay Communion visitors extend worship’s reach by making Communion visits to sick and shut-in Christians, the Holy Spirit works powerfully in and through them. Despite this, lay Communion visitors often fail to experience the Spirit as they perform their duty. Without this spiritual experience, they lack motivation for the ministry and miss opportunities for spiritual growth. However, if lay Communion visitors more fully understand the significance of their ministry, they will be positioned for a transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit’s work as they carry out their ministry of Communion visitation.

Eucharistic pneumatology is essential for developing criteria for discerning how participants might experience the work of the Holy Spirit while performing home Communion visits. The Biblical narrative is the primary source for developing criteria for

³⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament,” in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2019), 2, ELCA Resource Repository.

the Spirit's work in Communion, followed by the three ecumenical creeds and confessional writings of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Martin Luther's pneumatology and theology of Communion are also considered. Following that, the work of respected modern and contemporary Lutheran theologians is consulted, along with a survey of theologians across the denominational spectrum: Pentecostal, Catholic, and Anglican. Finally, we consider pastoral authority within the faith community. Discerning the Spirit is challenging; therefore, one must try to do so thoroughly and carefully. This is why extensive eucharistic pneumatology has been researched and developed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

The communication principle of immediacy is the interdisciplinary foundation of this project. “Immediacy is the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between two people.”¹ In Communion, Christ is made present and brought uniquely close by the power of the Spirit. For Lutherans, Christ is never physically closer than during the sacraments of Baptism (Matt. 28:20) and Communion (Luke 22:20-21), enabling emotional closeness. Therefore, Communion is a primary form of immediacy between the divine and the communicant. Immediacy is not a tool but rather an orientation one adopts when communicating, employing verbal and nonverbal strategies. Similarly, Communion employs verbal and nonverbal messages, both essential to the sacrament.

There is an apparent affinity between “communion” and “communication.” The terms share the Latin root word “communis,” which means common, public, or general.² Central to both terms is the concept of sharing. Communion is sharing a sacred experience, and communication is sharing information and meaning. Theologians have linked the terms throughout Christian history.

¹ Virginia P. Richmond, James C. McCroskey, and Mark Hickson, *Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Relations* (Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2008), 263.

² “Communication,” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, October 13, 2021, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/communication>.

Certainly, Communion is not a simple act of communication, as God is genuinely acting in the sacrament to work forgiveness, life, and salvation. However, communication takes place in Communion. Catholic theologian Thomas Stanks paid particular attention to the connection between Communion and communication. Equating the two, Stanks has written about the Eucharist as “Christ’s self-communication.”³

Seeing the Eucharistic celebration as communication between persons is most important for understanding the presence of Christ. His presence here and now is obvious, because He is revealing and communicating here and now. There are as many kinds of presence, however, as there are forms of activity, of communication, but persons are present to each other as far as they communicate. If there is no communication, a person could be present as a thing. Personal presence is born from communication between persons, and the sacraments are the language in which the community and Christ communicate.⁴

Though Stanks does not use the term “immediacy,” the concept is present in his writing, nonetheless.

Stanks recognizes that Communion is essential for Christ to come physically and emotionally close to the Christian community and individuals by making himself present and revealing God through the sacrament. Christ makes himself present in Communion as a person rather than an object. The orientation Christ adopts to communicate in the sacrament is immediacy, using verbal and nonverbal messages to relay his care and concern.

Stanks is not alone in bringing together the terms Communion and communication. The Federation of Asian Bishops (Catholic) published a paper entitled “Eucharist as Communication” to explore the communication dimension of the Eucharist.

³ Thomas D. Stanks, “The Eucharist: Christ’s Self-Communication in a Revelatory Event,” *Theological Studies* 28, No. 1 (1967): 27–50. doi:10.1177/004056396702800102.27.

⁴ Stanks, “The Eucharist: Christ’s Self-Communication in a Revelatory Event,” 41.

They boldly assert that the Eucharist is “the summit of all Christian communication.”⁵

Their chapter describes how the Eucharist communicates different things to people according to their personal, cultural, and spiritual perspectives.

The dimension of life in which one encounters the Eucharist colors its meaning. These dimensions include both sacred and secular arenas. Sebastian Perinnian⁶ provides the following table:

Communication Dimension	Food or meal	Sacrifice	Celebration	Communion	Sacrament
Religio-Pastoral	Eternal Banquet	Spiritual, self-emptying	Reconciliation	Experience of God	Grace
Socio-Cultural	Sharing	Freedom & Tolerance	Relationship	Harmony	Peace
Developmental	Caring	Mutual Cooperation	Education	Charity	Transformation
Ethical	Moral obligation	Talent Management	Human values	Justice	Sense of sacredness
Advocacy	Promotional	Networking	Good will	Human rights	Civil Responsibility

Table 1. Life Dimensions

As the table illustrates, within the religious dimension, the Eucharist communicates concepts such as reconciliation and grace, whereas interpreting the Eucharist from the socio-cultural dimension may illuminate concepts such as relationship and peace. Moving from one dimension of life to another changes how one interprets the Communion event.

⁵ Franz-Josef Eilers, “Eucharist: Summit of Christian Communication,” *FABC Papers 124* (2007): 2. <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/43671337/fabc-papers-no-124-federation-of-asian-bishops-conferences>.

⁶ Sebastian Perinnian, *FABC Papers No. 124*, 200.

Perinnian points out that communication always occurs through the Eucharist regardless of dimension.

Communication within the Eucharist is complex and multi-layered. God is the primary communicator (sender) in the Eucharist, communicating to the communicant (receiver). Secondly, the minister is God's instrument (channel) of communication. Being the channel in no way removes the minister from their act of communication with the communicant. God's divine immediacy is of primary importance in Communion, but the minister's human immediacy remains essential.

In ministry, God's act of immediacy is foundational, yet ministers also communicate their pastoral love through performing their sacred duties. The love of God and the love of the minister is not competitive because it draws from the same source. God's love, given through the Holy Spirit, enables and empowers ministers to love.

Jesus intentionally included human agency in the institution of the sacrament. "Take, eat" (Matthew 26:26), "Drink from it, all of you" (Matthew 26:27), and "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) are commands which necessitate human participation. From Christian ministry's inception, administering Communion has been essential. Therefore, communication layers in the Eucharist include divine-communicant, divine-minister, and minister-communicant.

Finally, the communicant employs verbal and nonverbal responses to the sacrament they receive. The communicant conveys their response to God and the minister, taking the forms of communicant-divine and communicant-minister. To further complicate matters, when Communion occurs within the gathered assembly, the communicants employ immediacy on one another (communicant-communicant).

Additionally, Communion visits extend and expand the congregation's worship by taking elements consecrated in the assembly's presence to those unable to gather. This action communicates the love of Jesus and the congregation's care and concern for the shut-in member. Additionally, the lay Communion visitor adopts the orientation of immediacy in the performance of this ministry, which sends a message of the minister's care to the shut-in member. In summary, immediacy is employed on multiple levels, communicating layers of care and concern. Each layer of the Communion visit sends a loving message to the receiver.

UCLA psychologist Albert Mehrabian was the first to illuminate immediacy as a communication principle. Mehrabian articulated this principle concerning psychology in the late 1960s. Interpersonal communication as a field of study was undeveloped at that time. Nevertheless, Mehrabian wrote about immediacy as a principle of communication that enabled closeness and displayed concern.

“Immediacy in the linguistic expression of a particular communicator referent relationship is positively correlated with the communicator's degree of positive effective, evaluative, and/or preferential experience of the referent.”⁷ Plainly stated, when one adopts the orientation of immediacy when communicating, there is a positive effect on the receiver.

When one employs immediacy, Mehrabian describes it metaphorically as the communicator, or sender, emotionally “approaching”⁸ the receiver. The opposite of approaching, Mehrabian calls “avoiding.” These terms illustrate how the position one

⁷ Albert Mehrabian, “Immediacy: An Indicator of Attitudes in Linguistic Communication,” *Journal of Personality*, 34 (1966): 26–34. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1966.tb01696.x>.

⁸ Albert Mehrabian, *Silent Messages*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1981), 13-14.

takes in communicating with someone either brings the communicator emotionally closer or pushes them emotionally farther away. Mehrabian conceded that immediacy could be employed effectively via verbal and nonverbal cues.

As an example of the emotional content in verbal messaging, Mehrabian gives this humorous illustration, “A mother, in referring to her son’s fiancé, could say, “our daughter to be,” “our son’s fiancé,” “his fiancé,” “his lady friend,” “his friend,” “she,” or “that thing” - showing increasing avoidance and dislike of the girl.”⁹ Likewise, nonverbal messaging can also affect emotional approach or avoidance. A woman once asked Mehrabian if her boyfriend’s chronic lateness for their dates was a message of avoidance, and Mehrabian felt it was likely.¹⁰

Mehrabian concluded that nonverbal cues were more effective than words at conveying emotional content. Mehrabian conducted a study to evaluate the emotional content of communication. The results of his study led him to develop the “7-38-55 rule.” This rule states that a sender relays the emotional content of their message via seven percent choice of words, 38 percent tone of voice, and 55 percent nonverbal cues. Though some dispute these percentages, communication experts acknowledge how

⁹ Mehrabian, *Silent Messages*, 135.

¹⁰ Mehrabian, *Silent Messages*, 142.

important tone of voice and non-verbal cues are to communicating.

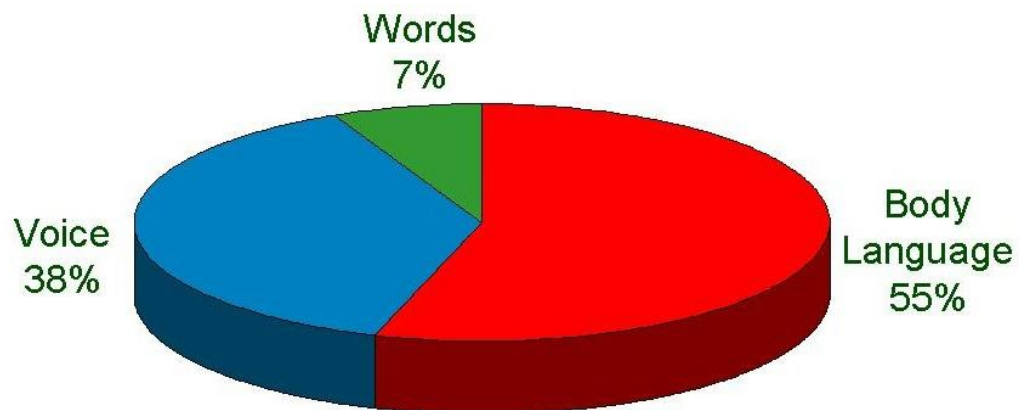


Figure 1. 7-38-55 rule

According to Mehrabian's rule, how one offers the sacrament determines 93 percent of its emotional content. In the context of Holy Communion, the words are already chosen and are taken directly from the New Testament. It is important to emphasize that according to orthodox Christian doctrine, emotional content does not affect the spiritual efficacy of the sacrament. What God does in the sacrament is not affected by how communicants feel about it or how well the minister offers it. In other words, immediacy does not determine efficacy. The sacrament is always efficacious when received in faith.

However, immediacy can and should be employed in Communion because God intends the sacrament to communicate God's care and concern. From a theological standpoint, Communion is primarily an interaction between God and the communicant. Therefore, what is most important is what God communicates to the one who receives the sacrament. The minister who gives Communion must consider how God desires to communicate to the communicant. Holy Communion is a gift of love from God. How the minister offers God's gift must communicate God's love. That communication of love is

through immediacy. As immediacy involves verbal and nonverbal cues, this chapter examines each.

Verbal

The central feature of the verbal aspect of Communion is the Words of Institution. These are the words spoken by the administrator of the sacrament, which spiritually connects to the elements of bread and wine to infuse them with the real presence of Christ. The Words of Institution originate in scripture and contain the Word of God. In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther describes sacraments as physical signs connected to God's Word of promise and command. If anything, Luther erred toward stressing the Word of God over the physical sign involved in the sacraments. In his catechism, in response to the question of how bodily eating and drinking brings forgiveness, life, and salvation, Luther answered:

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: "given for you" and "shed for you... for the forgiveness of sin." These words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes in these very words has what they declare and state, namely, "forgiveness of sin."¹¹

For Luther, this was true of both sacraments. Luther again emphasizes the centrality of God's Word when explaining Baptism.

Clearly the water does not do it, but the Word of God, which is with, in, and among the water, and faith, which trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is plain water and not a baptism, but with the Word of God it is a baptism, that is, a grace-filled water of life and a "bath of the new birth in the Holy Spirit."¹²

¹¹ Luther, *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism*, 50.

¹² Luther, *A Contemporary Translation of Luther's Small Catechism*, 42.

As the Word of God is central to Holy Communion, examining the phrase's meaning is helpful. Unfortunately, the phrase "Word of God" has many meanings. This chapter will examine the three most accepted meanings of the "Word of God."¹³

Word of God

First, most Christians believe the Bible contains the Word of God. However, Christians differ on how the Bible is the Word of God, with some traditions holding that God is the author and all contents are inerrant. Others teach that God inspired the Bible, but humans wrote it, making it flawed. An example of two Christian traditions on opposite ends of the biblical interpretation spectrum is the Southern Baptist Convention and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The Southern Baptist Convention, in their statement of faith, uses descriptors for the Bible such as "perfect," "without error," and "totally true and trustworthy." In contrast, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America points out the "diversity of viewpoints" and "complexity of the many narratives"¹⁴ in scripture and yet still considers it the "source and norm" for teaching and practice.

These examples represent two extremes, and many Christians fall in the middle of the spectrum. What remains common for all Christians is that the Bible, or the Word of God, is an essential source of God's communication with humanity. However, of course,

¹³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Chichester, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 112. ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Scriptures, Creeds, Confessions," *ELCA.org*, accessed December 1, 2022, <https://www.elca.org/Faith/ELCA-Teaching/Scripture-Creeds-Confessions>.

the most crucial thing communicated through the Word of God in the Bible is Jesus, the Word of God.

Another meaning of the phrase “Word of God” was first developed in the Gospel of John and refers to Jesus Christ. In the first chapter, John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1). To say, “In the beginning was the Word” is to say that in the beginning is God’s act of communication.¹⁵

In the person of Jesus Christ, God reveals himself most clearly. This revelation of God is not limited to the words Jesus spoke but also his character and actions. “God speaks to the world through the words Jesus utters, the actions he performs, and the death that he dies.”¹⁶ To understand how crucial this is to Christian theology, one only needs to contrast the God revealed in the Old Testament with the same God revealed through Jesus in the Gospels. The mercy, grace, and steadfast love of God revealed in Jesus can be glimpsed in the Hebrew scriptures, but the consistency with which Jesus displays these characteristics of God in the New Testament is striking.

The final meaning of the phrase “Word of God” is the one most relevant to interpreting the Eucharist. This meaning refers to the Bible’s theological core, the gospel or good news of Jesus Christ. No codified formulation of this message exists, but it expresses God’s unconditional love for the world revealed in Jesus Christ.

In Communion, the Words of Institution contain the Word of God, reminding communicants of Jesus’ sacrifice out of love to reconcile God and humanity. Within the

¹⁵ Craig R. Koester, *The Word of Life: A Theology of John’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 26.

¹⁶ Koester, *The Word of Life*, 27.

Communion liturgy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the words “The body of Christ, given for you.” and “The blood of Christ, shed for you.” spoken to each communicant are a formulation of the Word of God. The Word of God is the essential verbal portion of Communion, and it displays immediacy as the message conveys God’s love, care, and concern to the communicant.

Verbal immediacy that does not include the Word of God also occurs in Communion visits. Ideally, a warm greeting and brief introduction begin a Communion visit. Minimal small talk and active listening to inquire how the communicant is doing occur. The service of Holy Communion is offered, followed by a gracious farewell. Brief but not rushed is how a Communion visit is best conducted. Each part of the visit is an opportunity to employ immediacy and convey God’s and the congregation’s care and concern. Therefore, verbal immediacy is essential. Mehrabian reminds us that the verbal aspect is not the only thing that matters in these interactions, especially regarding emotional reactions. For the emotional response to Communion, it is crucial to look to the nonverbal cues of the communicant.

The Word Made Flesh – Nonverbal Cues

“Nonverbal communication encompasses behaviors that generate meaning without using words.”¹⁷ Nonverbal communication falls into these broad categories: physical appearance, gestures, facial expressions, vocal behavior, touch, and use of space and time. Pastor and author Stephen Bedard wrote, “God’s clearest communication to

¹⁷ Isa N. Engleberg and Dianna R. Wynn, *Think Communication*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Pearson, 2015), 96.

humanity was not factual information but physical expression in the form of the incarnation.”¹⁸ Otherwise stated, the person of Jesus is a nonverbal cue of God’s love for the world. In addition, nonverbal cues have the potential to embody care and concern. In them, care and concern are incarnated. Therefore, careful attention to what the lay Communion visitor communicates beyond words is vital.

Physical Appearance

For this chapter, discussion of lay Communion visitors' physical appearance will be limited. One’s physical appearance communicates something, but the message is often unfair. Unsurprisingly, the physical appearance of attractive people often elicits positive reactions, whereas those of less attractive people often evoke the opposite. Many of their physical features are outside a person’s control. For this reason, some standard texts¹⁹ for nonverbal communication mention physical appearance but avoid going into depth on the topic.

Lay Communion visitors' focus must be on what they can manage. Neatness, cleanliness, and appropriate attire are areas that anyone can pursue. Rather than creating universal criteria for the ideal physical appearance, it is more helpful to develop principles for maximizing the appearance of each person. In the congregational context, suggestions for appropriate dress, mutually determined by leaders and volunteers, are the extent to which lay Communion visitors can be subject to appearance regulation.

¹⁸ Stephen Bedard, “The Word Made Flesh: A Theological Paradigm for Understanding Nonverbal Communication,” *The Canadian Journal of Theology, Mental Health, and Disability*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (April 2022): 66-69, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/cjtmhd/article/view/38311>.

¹⁹ David Matsumoto, Mark G. Frank, and Hyi Sung Hwang, eds., *Nonverbal Communication: Science and Applications* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013), 5, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Gestures

Gestures are most often made with hands, though head and facial movements may be gestures as well. What differentiates gestures from basic movement is that gestures are “embodied cognition; that is, they are movements that express some kind of thought.”²⁰ Some of those thoughts embodied by gestures are more connected to emotions than others. Therefore, one can observe emotional content in gestures.

When gestures are driven by emotion they become less discreet, and may occur in concert with postural shifts and facial expressions that incidentally emphasize and clarify the meaning that is being communicated. Beyond the information being conveyed, they can turn up the volume, so to speak, by enhanced amplitude of movement, more abrupt onset and offset and faster pace, and thus act as a more forceful signal, analogous to shouting rather than speaking.²¹

Whereas emoting is sometimes involuntary in facial expressions, it is easier to manage what one communicates through gestures. Gestures are nonverbal cues that one practices. Unlike facial expressions and vocal behavior, gestures are not necessarily universal and must be learned. If one can learn gestures, one can learn how to use them effectively.

Gestures can take two forms. The first form, “speech illustrators,” occurs concurrently with speech. Speech illustrators, used well, can enhance what one says. The second form takes place independently of speech and is called “emblems.” Emblems are particularly helpful when speaking is difficult, such as communicating across distances.

²⁰ Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang, *Nonverbal Communication*, 75.

²¹ Marcel Kinsbourne, “Gestures as Embodied Cognition: A Neurodevelopmental Interpretation,” *Gesture* 6 (2006): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1075/gest.6.2.05kin>.

A vital gesture for interpersonal communication that does not involve hands is head nodding. Studies have shown that nodding and smiling while listening indicate attentiveness to the speaker and produce a positive emotional response from them.

Facial Expression

Due to the intricacies of the face, it is the most complex signaling system of the body. The signals the face conveys may be voluntary or involuntary. The most critical thing faces convey is emotion. When one can accurately interpret the emotional signals of the face, it is a powerful skill for interpersonal exchanges. “Being able to read others’ emotions can give you insights not only to their emotional states but to their intentions, motivations, personalities, trustworthiness, and credibility. Emotions can inform us of malicious intent, hidden information, or downright deception.”²²

Emotions provide such revelatory information because they are immediate and involuntary reactions. Additionally, some emotional signals conveyed by faces are universal. Those universal are anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise.²³ Facial expressions provide more than necessary information; they also drive social interactions.

For the lay Communion visitor, one can exercise only so much control over facial expressions, as many are involuntary. However, mindfulness in expressing calmness and warmth can improve interaction. More importantly, growing one’s skill of interpreting

²² Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang, *Nonverbal Communication*, 15.

²³ Paul Ekman, “Universals and Cultural Differences in Facial Expressions of Emotions,” *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), 207-282.

others' facial expressions is of value to lay Communion visitors. Accurately reading the communicant's emotions will prove helpful for the effectiveness of the visit.

Vocal Behavior

Vocal behavior is a nonverbal communication cue that does not refer to the words used in an interaction. Considering this fact, how something is said is at least as important as what is said. The tone of voice and the style of speech convey information. Tonal qualities are things like pitch, loudness, timbre, and resonance. Style qualities include speech rate, response length, latency, pauses, and errors.

Interestingly, the word choice, tone of voice, and style of speech can each communicate different information. The contrast of words and vocal behavior enables communication, such as sarcasm. Vocal behavior reveals more specific types of positive emotion than facial expression. One study found that the emotion of interest was correctly interpreted by 75 percent of subjects by listening to vocal behavior. Vocal behavior plays a vital role in interaction. Both comprehension and persuasion are affected by vocal behavior.

Additionally, vocal cues enable conversing people to take turns in the conversation. There is a perspective that vocal behaviors provoke reactions from the receiver rather than reveal emotional information about the sender. Psychologist Mark G. Frank summarizes, "the vocal acoustics serve the organism by driving the emotional reactions of others; For example, laughter and crying have been shown to provoke strong

emotional reactions.” (Hatfield, Hsee, Costello, Weisman, & Denney, 1995; Neumann & Strack, 2000).²⁴

Laughing and crying may occur in a Communion visit, but subtler vocal behaviors are more common. For example, singing, whispering, and yawning are vocal behaviors that provoke emotional reactions. Some lay Communion visitors employ singing to extend the worship experience from the assembly to the communicant.

On the other hand, visitors should avoid yawning during the visit as that could communicate boredom and disinterest. Instead, Communion visitors use their vocal behavior in one-on-one conversations to communicate interest, care, and concern. At the same time, the visitor will listen carefully to the communicant’s vocal behavior for subtle emotional clues, which may be necessary for the interaction.

Use of Space

People’s use of space, or distance, is another nonverbal cue that, if used appropriately, may communicate care and concern. Cultural Anthropologist Edward T. Hall created zones of interpersonal distance, which are essential for communication. Diverse cultures have different perceptions of spatial appropriateness. The figure on the next page illustrates the different zones for typical North Americans.

²⁴ Matsumoto, Frank, and Hwang, *Nonverbal Communication*, 68.

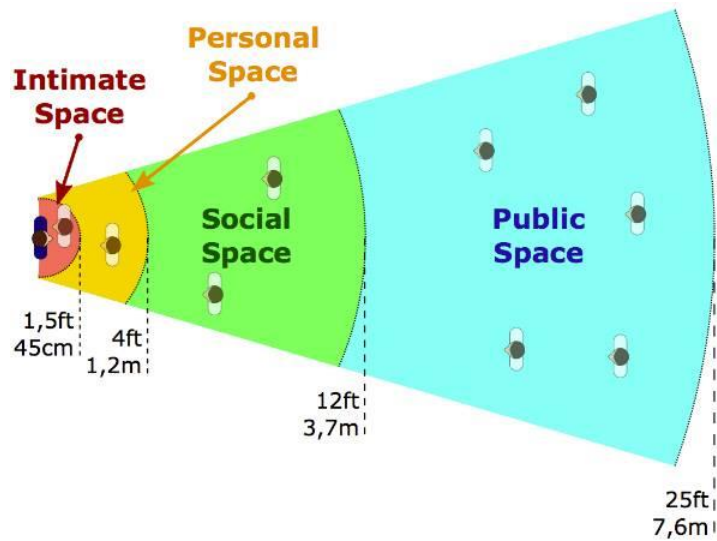


Figure 2. Spatial Zones of North Americans

The figure shows that the more intimate the interaction, the less distance is required. Though trends exist, spatial perception is unique to each person and involves many factors. Hall explains, “sense of space is a synthesis of many sensory inputs: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and thermal. Not only does each of these constitute a complex system (for example, the dozen or more different ways of experiencing depth visually), but each is molded and patterned by culture.”²⁵

Though one communicates much through their use of space, the messaging can be confused due to cultural differences. For example, Hall observed that when North Americans were overseas, they often perceived others as standing “too close” in conversations, which would cause them to back away. As a result, some judged the North Americans as “cold, aloof, withdrawn, and disinterested.”²⁶

²⁵ Edward T. Hall, “Proxemics,” *Current Anthropology* 9, No. 2-3 (1968): 83–108.

²⁶ Hall, “Proxemics,” 84.

In the context of home Communion visits, the size of the room the communicant is confined to, rather than what is culturally appropriate, often determines the space between the visitor and communicant. In addition, the furniture configuration within the room may determine the amount of space for the exchange.

Different portions of the visit require different spatial usage. The initial greeting may be close and involve touching, such as a handshake. Immediately after greeting, the visitor will evaluate how much space is needed to avoid being invasive while conveying warmth. The act of communing will bring the minister and communicant closer together. Loss of hearing and visual impairment necessitates closer-than-normal proximity.

During the distribution of elements, the distance is such that the minister will occupy the communicant's personal, if not intimate, space. It is not unusual for shut-in communicants to require assistance eating and drinking, which involves occupying intimate space and possibly even touching. Though necessity determines much of the spatial usage, it has the potential to communicate closeness and concern, nonetheless.

Touch

Touch is a complex and controversial form of nonverbal immediacy. However, there are numerous studies on the benefits of touch. These studies indicate touch is “central...in all aspects of our lives – cognitive, emotional, developmental, behavioral – from womb into old age.”²⁷

²⁷ Maria Konnikova, “The Power of Touch,” *Newyorker.com*, March 4, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/science/maria-konnikova/power-touch>.

Those who have had positive experiences with touch tend to benefit in many ways from appropriate touch. “The right kind (of touch) can lower blood pressure, heart rate, and cortisol levels, stimulate the hippocampus (an area of the brain that is central to memory), and drive the release of a host of hormones and neuropeptides that have been linked to positive and uplifting emotions.”²⁸ However, the opposite proves true for those who have experienced trauma from touch. Therefore, the visitor must use touch very sparingly and carefully.

Pastor Karen Lampe offers helpful boundaries for touch when providing pastoral care. She cautions using touch only to serve the care-receiver’s needs, never the needs of the caregiver, to always get permission before touching, and for the caregiver to behave as if the interaction with the care-receiver is being recorded. Lampe asks regarding this last caution, “How would you (the caregiver) feel watching it, having your spouse watch it, or the other person’s (care-receiver’s) spouse watch it?”²⁹ Given such caution, it is natural to question whether using touch is worth the trouble. “Touch is important because it is the most effective means to communicate our feelings and emotions.”³⁰

Unfortunately, withholding touch can communicate negative feelings. At the very least, most people are comfortable shaking hands when greeting and holding hands while praying, though no harm comes from asking permission.

Use of Time

²⁸ Konnikova, “The Power of Touch.”

²⁹ Karen Lampe, *The Caring Congregation: Training Manual and Resource Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 35.

³⁰ Richmond, McCroskey, and Hickson, *Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Relations*, 175.

The use of time is the final nonverbal communication cue to consider. Common phrases such as “spending time” and “wasting time” reveal the implicit cultural value of using time. How one uses their time communicates the priorities of that person. For example, if a Communion visitor makes an appointment to bring Communion and arrives for the appointment late, the communicant may feel the appointment was not important to the visitor.

Cultural differences may also influence how a person uses their time, but within all cultures, there are variations in how people use their time. For example, North Americans tend to be schedule-driven, which may result from their industrialized culture. The time the lay Communion visitor devotes to the visit may communicate the amount of care and concern the visitor has for the communicant.

Additionally, how the visitor uses the time during a Communion visit indicates care and concern, or lack thereof. Staying on task during the visit while giving full attention to the communicant is the ideal use of time. The visitor must employ artfulness to keep the visit brief while utilizing the time to communicate genuine care for the person they visit.

Ultimately, the amount of time needed depends on the relationship and circumstance. Studies on the use of time in physician-patient relationships indicate, “The actual amount of time in an interaction is less relevant than whether the patient feels the amount of time taken is enough.”³¹ This fact holds true in all relationships. In home Communion visits, the goal is to give enough time to communicate God’s care and concern and that of the faith community.

³¹ Richmond, McCroskey, and Hickson, *Nonverbal Behavior in Interpersonal Relations*, 205.

Conclusion

Holy Communion employs verbal and nonverbal immediacy, the communication principle that conveys care and concern. Communication in Holy Communion is complex and multi-layered, involving God, the minister, the congregational community, and the communicants. Jesus Christ instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion as an act of love to offer his followers forgiveness, life, and salvation. Examining the principle of immediacy within the field of Communication, especially the best practices of the principle, provides helpful insight and direction for lay Communion visitors to maximize the care and concern they convey.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The project was a six-session experiential symposium on the significance of Holy Communion. One must not overlook the experiential nature of the symposium. Educating was not the primary goal of the project. Instead, immersing participants in Communion's significance through play-acting, singing, costuming, eating, drinking, mixing, baking, listening, and sharing so that they would experience the significance first-hand, was the objective. Better understanding the sacred significance of Communion opens lay Communion visitors' hearts and minds to their own experience of the Holy Spirit as they carry out their ministry.

Reflecting on a quarter century of congregational ministry, the most apparent thread in my ministry journey is the constant course corrections from fear to faith following each ministry encounter. Experiencing the Holy Spirit undergirding and fortifying me as I took risks to minister propelled me forward as a minister and a follower of Jesus Christ. It is improbable that my experience is unique.

The Bible gives examples such as Abraham, Moses, and the Apostle Paul, who each grew closer to God and better understood God's will once he worked through them on behalf of others. Taking these specific Bible figures as examples, faith grows best when planted in the soil of ministry. As all people are precious to God, growing in faith

through performing ministry must be made available to the clergy and the laity. This project educated and inspired lay Communion visitors about the significance of Holy Communion, which equipped them to perform their ministry and positioned them for their own experience of the Holy Spirit.

In Chapter Two, Luke's story of Jesus sending the Seventy provides the most robust support for lay ministry in the four Gospels. Jesus weighs the demands of his ministry against his own human and self-limited ability to meet them. His conclusion is to share his ministry with others, even beyond his more thoroughly trained twelve disciples. The results were divine.

Having performed their ministry, "The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!' He said to them, 'I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.'" (Luke 10:17-18). The excitement, both from the Seventy and from Jesus, is palpable.

The Seventy seemingly never experienced God the way they did when they ministered. God had done through them immeasurably more than they could have asked or imagined (Ephesians 3:20). Even so, Jesus informs them that God had used them even beyond their comprehension.

Without them realizing it, he tells them God's work through them was an assault on the evil powers of the world. This is a biblical example of how ministering benefits the laity today – with newfound joy, purpose, inspiration, and closeness to God. These are benefits to the lay ministers as they help meet the needs of others. Such benefits alone make this project worthwhile, but even more so because, according to Jesus, the ministry of the laity benefits God's Kingdom.

Chapter Three examines how Chapter Two's biblical foundation played out historically in the church. Protestant Pietism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries mirrors issues in today's church in a significant way – ministry supply could not meet demand, creating opportunities for lay ministry, which arose in reaction to a period of ministry professionalism. Researching lay ministers of the Pietist era provided rich anecdotal evidence that lay ministry met the increasing demand for ministry and enriched the lives of lay ministers.

Though Jesus warns that pouring new wine into old wineskins will only burst the skins (Luke 5:37), history appears to move cyclically. Furthermore, Jesus' resurrection proclaims that God will make the old new, just as the old lay ministry models developed during Pietism can be rebirthed for today's laity. Studying how the church successfully addressed problems in the past sheds light on how the church might successfully address similar problems today. Pietism produced countless accounts of lay ministry that strengthened the church while strengthening the faith of lay ministers. This project seeks to answer the question: "Why not today?"

In the ministry context for this project, lay Communion visitors were the ideal group of lay ministers with whom to experiment. This group's ministry had ground to a halt with the Pandemic but was already floundering before this catastrophic global event. The lay Communion visitors were capable and willing but lacked that palpable sense of God working through them, as exemplified by the Seventy in Luke 10. They performed their ministry dutifully and faithfully but without much joy and astonishment. Would teaching them the holy significance of their ministry change their experience?

Crucially important is the fact that lay ministry does not equate to untrained ministry. Today's lay ministers, much like those in the era of Pietism, are equipped and empowered to perform their ministry competently and confidently. A symposium on the significance of Holy Communion offers the training and inspiration to prepare the lay Communion visitors to experience God's Spirit working in and through them.

Chapter Four is a brief eucharistic pneumatology, studying how God works in the sacrament of Communion through the Holy Spirit. Particular Lutheran theology draws from authoritative sources: the Bible, Creeds, and Lutheran Confessions. The Holy Spirit works unexpectedly (John 3:8). To evaluate how the lay Communion visitors experienced the Holy Spirit, a theological foundation is necessary to develop criteria for that experience. As lay Communion visitors report their experience, one must ask, "Can this experience be the work of the Spirit according to authoritative sources?"

Participants approach the communicant with immediacy, the Communication principle studied in Chapter Five, to set the stage for a meaningful Communion visit. The Holy Spirit always works in Communion, fulfilling Jesus' promise of being present and forgiving the sins of those who receive the sacrament. Though the spiritual benefits are assured through Jesus' Words of Institution, what is not assured are the physical and emotional experiences of the communicant. Positioning themselves with immediacy communicates care and concern throughout the visit to foster a positive outcome, allowing the visitor to experience the Holy Spirit better.

Methodology

Testing the hypothesis for this project presented several challenges. What is being looked for in the data collection are instances of the participants experiencing the Holy Spirit in a new way after learning the significance of Holy Communion. Therefore, collecting the data requires answering two questions. The first question is whether the participants experience the Holy Spirit. Only if the answer to this first question is affirmative can the second question be explored, namely, is their experience of the Holy Spirit different than before learning Communion's significance?

Quantifying the Spirit's work is impossible, but progress is possible when qualifying it. At the advice of Professional Associates, qualitative data was collected through surveys, researcher observations, one-on-one interviews, guided journal entries, and focused group discussions. Each of these tools, by design, identified the work of the Spirit in and through the participants.

Chapter Four's eucharistic pneumatology developed theological criteria to assess the spiritual content of the participants' experience. Additionally, I maintain some authority to discern spiritual content by my ordination, though the discerned content was tested against authoritative biblical, creedal, and confessional sources.

Evidence of the Spirit's movement in Communion visits may include, but is not limited to, experiences of forgiveness, comfort, protection, enlightenment, obedience, empowerment, reception of life and spiritual gifts, increased trust, increased ability to love, and glimpses of God's kingdom.

The first data collection tool was the pre and post-symposium survey. These two surveys were identical and were developed to compare participants' spiritual experiences

before and after the symposium. The comparison focused on what the participants experienced spiritually as they made Communion visits before and after more profoundly understanding the significance of Holy Communion. The surveys required the participants to indicate, with specificity, how they experienced the Spirit during the Communion visit.

To complete the pre-symposium surveys, participants were required to make one Communion visit, in pairs, the week before receiving any instruction on the significance of Communion. To sharpen the focus on the spiritual experience of participants, they were trained on the mechanics of Communion visits and provided with all necessary resources to be competent for their initial visit. This training helped to eliminate distractions from the encounter caused by incompetence in the task.

The post-symposium surveys were completed following another Communion visit the week after the symposium. At that point, participants had been thoroughly immersed in the significance of Communion. Another critical aspect of the surveys is that they contained the only numerically quantifiable questions of all the data collection instruments, assigning a numerical value to the intensity of their spiritual experience.

Guided journal entries were the second instrument for data collection. A question was given for each day of the symposium and one each of the three weeks following. One benefit of this format was the ability to gather data in real-time to see how participants progressed in their understanding of Communion and how that progress impacted their perception and awareness of the Spirit's work during Communion visits. Some questions, particularly questions one through five, were intended to be educational and devotional to encourage theological reflection. Questions six through eight were more evaluative and

focused on the participants' experience of Communion visits, especially concerning the Spirit's work during the visits.

The first three questions required the participants to describe a personal spiritual encounter to determine how they might articulate such an experience. The fourth question set the stage for the participants' expectation that they would experience the Holy Spirit during their Communion visit. The final educational and devotional question, question five, reinforced the profundity of the task to which the participant has been called. Question six was the first evaluative question of the journals. After learning Communion's significance, the question allowed participants to express their experience of the Spirit at the Communion visit. The answer to question seven indicated precisely how the symposium made a difference in the participants' spiritual experience while making Communion visits. Finally, question eight allowed participants to note their spiritual progression due to the symposium.

The participants were free to choose the length and thoroughness of their entries. If the symposium successfully imparted a better understanding of Communion's significance, the depth of responses to the journal questions would increase over time. Another benefit of journal questions is that some people are more articulate through writing than conversation or discussion.

For two weeks following the symposium, appointments were made to interview participants one-on-one. By this point, the participants had made two Communion visits, completed the symposium, and had been journaling. The interview questions focused on their experience of God during and outside their Communion visits. These interviews were recorded using a speech-to-text feature of a word processing application. Each

participant was informed they were being recorded and gave their permission. Interviews took place in a room with high visibility and soundproofing so that participants would feel safe, comfortable, and confident sharing their experiences during interviews. The one-on-one interview format allowed for rewording questions the participants did not fully understand.

The interview comprised three questions. The first interview question allowed participants to compare their spiritual experiences between their first and second Communion visits. The second interview question moved beyond the confines of the Communion visit to changes the participant experienced in any facet of their life following the symposium. Finally, the third interview question directly correlated the participant's understanding of the significance of Communion with the participant's spiritual experience of Communion visits.

The final instrument for data collection was focused group discussion. All eight participants gathered in a semi-circle for this discussion and were asked four questions. This instrument situated the participants within a group to process their experiences. Hearing each other reflect on the same questions jogged memories and allowed for constructive agreement or disagreement.

The first discussion question invited participants to reflect on the spiritual content of their first Communion visit. The second discussion question invited participants to reflect on the spiritual content of their second Communion visit. Once again, contrasts and comparisons naturally occurred while discussing the first two questions. The third question invited the participants to compare their spiritual experiences between their first

and second visits straightforwardly. The final question of the project revealed its hypothesis and asked directly if the participants agreed or disagreed.

Implementation

Preliminary recruitment began six months ahead of the symposium when save-the-date postcards were handed to local ELCA pastors in hopes that they would recruit their laypeople to participate. At the same time, a save-the-date announcement for the symposium was included in Mt. Olive's January newsletter so interested persons could plan their summer vacations around the symposium.

Obtaining commitments and consent forms from participants began two and one-half months before the symposium and took the form of a sign-up station near the worship space at Mt. Olive and emails to local pastoral colleagues with sign-up forms and posters attached. By this point, announcements of the symposium were placed in Mt. Olive's weekly worship bulletins and monthly church newsletters. Announcements for the symposium were also made at worship. Colorful posters advertising the symposium were displayed throughout the church facility, and local ELCA pastors were handed copies for use at their churches.

After one month of recruitment and 45 days prior to the start of the project, consent forms and detailed written explanations of the project were mailed to all participants via USPS First-Class mail. Individuals were invited to participate in one of three ways. Participating as a doctoral project study participant required the most time and effort. Individuals could also attend the symposium as training for home Communion visitation even if they chose not to participate in the study or have data collected about

their participation. The final group of participants were invited to attend sessions to learn more about the significance of Holy Communion.

The project ran from July 6 to August 20, 2023. These dates include two opportunities for participants to shadow a Communion visit at two local nursing homes. On July 9, one week before the symposium, one ninety-minute training retreat for home Communion visits was provided and required for all participants. A Simple liturgy for Communion visits was distributed and explained, as were pre and post-visit prayers and portable Communion kits. The training retreat concluded by answering participant questions. Crucially, the training retreat did not delve into the spiritual significance of Communion.

Participants were assigned Shut-in members and provided with their addresses and contact information. Participants each made one Communion visit in teams of two during the week following the training retreat and prior to the first session of the symposium.

The symposium was five ninety-minute sessions from July 23 through July 27, 2023, followed by a commissioning service the following Sunday morning. Symposium sessions took place from 6-7:30 p.m. Times and dates were chosen to encourage participation. Mt. Olive tends to be less busy in the summer, and members participate better when courses are offered in one week versus stretching out sessions over several weeks. This format fits into a familiar vacation Bible school format in which Mt. Olive members are comfortable.

In addition to the learning sessions, participants made eight journal entries – daily during sessions and weekly for the following three weeks. I was the primary teacher

throughout the symposium, with assistance from my wife for the Interdisciplinary session and logistics help from several Context Associates.

Mt. Olive's current lay Communion visitors and potential volunteers for the ministry comprised most of the participants but were joined by their counterparts from a neighboring ELCA congregation. Participants committed to attending all sessions, making two Communion visits, completing consent forms, and undergoing a background check. The number of study participants was eight, and seventeen other inquisitive learners joined them. All study participants were between the ages of 65 and 75 and were female except one.

All sessions occurred in the large Heritage Fellowship Hall on Mt. Olive's campus. Powerpoint slides were projected on a widescreen television, and six round tables, each with four chairs facing the same direction, provided seating and a surface for writing, eating, and making bread. The Venerable Dr. Harvey Huth, a co-author of *The Handbook for Eucharistic Ministers and Eucharistic Visitors* (2007) for the Episcopal Diocese of Albany, New York, consulted on this project's format and overall content.

Participants completed pre-symposium surveys in the first ten minutes of the first symposium session. These surveys intended to establish participants' awareness of the Spirit's movement in and through them at Communion visits before being taught the spiritual significance of Holy Communion. This survey was identical to the post-symposium survey and served as a basis for comparison to it.

The symposium's first learning session was the biblical basis for Communion and began with a Bible study on Luke 22:7-20, Luke's pericope on the Lord's Supper. As the

participants moved through the story, an abbreviated Passover meal was shared to provide historical context for Jesus' institution of the sacrament.

The Passover was structured around three cups – three moments in the ritualistic meal to bless and drink. Emphasis was given to Jesus' use of this ancient sacred feast to interpret the significance of his immanent death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Participants were given grape juice, roasted lamb (or beets for vegetarians), lettuce, salt water, horseradish, and unleavened bread. Each element helped immerse participants in the Passover story of how God freed his people from the Egyptians. The juice and bread were also used, as Jesus used them, to teach how Jesus' death and resurrection freed his people from sin, death, and evil.

In the second half of the first session, Paul's extensive treatment of the sacrament in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 was explored and reframed. In this passage, Paul constructs a barrier of worthiness for those receiving Communion by writing, "For all who eat and drink without discerning the body eat and drink judgment against themselves." (1 Corinthians 11:29).

Delving deeply into the historical context of the Bible passage provided a more nuanced perspective of Paul's point, namely that Paul was correcting the more affluent Christians who selfishly ate all the food (including Communion) before the Christian laborers were able to arrive for worship after their workday.

Paul points out that one is worthy to receive the sacrament in humility and gratitude but unworthy when received in the spirit of pridefulness and selfishness. Recalling how Jesus used the Passover story of liberation to give meaning to his liberating act on the Cross, it is clear that Communion is Christ's gift that frees rather

than binds, elevates rather than oppresses, and heals rather than wounds. One is unworthy to receive the sacrament when done so in opposition to the spirit in which Christ gives it, namely to oppress and marginalize others.

Finally, participants engaged in the topic of worthiness related to Communion, both of the receivers' and the givers.' Journals were distributed to participants, and the first journal question was projected onto the screen.

The second session occurred within a communal snack meal where participants brought homemade dishes to share as a reenactment of an ancient agape feast. This setting of a shared meal was fitting as the session's focus was the history of the sacrament's interpretation and use.

This session repeatedly highlighted that Communion was the central act of Christian worship until the Reformation. The sacrament has evolved over two millennia, transforming from an egalitarian practice for all Christ-followers in the first century to a ritual reserved for those proven faithful in the centuries following. Over time, Communion morphed from being a victory feast to a mourning meal.

After Constantine legalized the Christian faith in 313 C.E., the Roman Rite of the sacrament gradually became the standard form for the Western church and brought an extraordinary emphasis on the concept of sacrifice as central to the meaning of Communion.

In the Middle Ages, the focus of the sacrament diverted from God's work to the work of priests. Along with this shift, Communion took on a mystical quality that encouraged awe while discouraging participation. Lay persons who received Communion did so in part, consuming only the bread.

The session was divided into four eras of church history, and simple costumes were distributed to participants to represent each era visually and to add delight to the lesson. The first era studied was the church of the first century. Because Christians were a small minority in that era, only two participants were given costumes and crowns to represent the prevalent first-century theme that Christians were a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9) and beneficiaries of Jesus's victory over sin, death, and evil. A verse from a celebratory hymn, "The Feast of Victory," was sung to emphasize the joyful nature of Communion in the first century.

In the second era, the second and third centuries, the participants learned that the church grew in number but also developed requirements for catechetical instruction in order to be baptized. Subsequently, this instruction became a requirement for Communion as well. Three more crowns were distributed to participants but were soon taken away to represent how the catechists were dismissed from worship before Communion. A second verse to the celebratory hymn was sung as Communion was still considered joyful.

The Imperial church was the third era studied; over half of the participants received crowns representing church growth. Complex hierarchies developed within the church in that era, so one participant wore a chasuble and another stole. As the Imperial church's worship became more formal than previously, participants practiced bowing and genuflecting. Still joyfully, a third verse of the celebratory hymn was sung.

The Medieval church was the final era studied in this session. Nearly everyone in the Western world was Christian by this era, but worship had become somber. All participants returned their crowns and were given black veils to wear over their faces.

Participants learned how Christians of this time faced multiple barriers to Communion and rarely received it. The hymn sung was no longer joyful but one of mourning, “Ah, Holy Jesus.” This session took participants to the brink of the Reformation to create tension that would only be resolved in the next session.

Session three offered an overview of Luther’s view of Communion based on brief portions of his Small Catechism (1529) and his criticism of the church’s abuse of Communion from his *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520). The participants explored four significant features of Luther’s eucharistic theology: ordinary elements connected to God’s Word, Law and Gospel in the Words of Institution, the real presence of Jesus in the meal, and Communion’s benefits.

To connect physically with the lesson, participants made Communion bread while the teaching occurred. Ingredients were distributed to participants, and a display was made of the ingredient packaging to make the point that Communion elements originate as ordinary materials that only become special when connected to the word of God.

Participants mixed dry ingredients with wet using their hands in plastic gloves. As hands got messy, participants learned that Jesus gets his hands dirty by coming in Communion to invade our lives' messiness. Our mess, taking the form of sin, weakness, and apathy, is what Jesus’ real presence deals with when we receive Communion in faith.

Participants shaped the dough into loaves, marking them with a cross. The dough becomes the body of Christ, marked with a cross, as Christians are members of the body of Christ, also marked with a cross at baptism. A contextual associate gathered the loaves for baking. Cleanup was easy, disposing of plastic gloves, table cloths, paper mixing

bowls, and aprons. Cleaning symbolized Jesus' work of forgiveness in Communion – making those who receive both clean and new.

The smell of freshly baked bread filled the room as participants began the second half of the session, examining three abuses of Communion that Luther confronted. The abuses were withholding the Cup, requiring transubstantiation, and equating Mass to sacrifice. Brief excerpts from Luther's *Babylonian Captivity* (1520) were read and discussed.

The discussion of withholding the Cup enabled the participants to reflect on the question of worthiness regarding receiving Communion. Luther emphasized God as the primary actor in Communion. Rather than the priest's action of consecrating or the congregation's action of receiving, Luther stressed Jesus' action, in his Words of Institution, of giving commands (law), "Take and eat. Take and drink." and fulfilling his promises (gospel), "This is my body. This is my blood...for you." Participants considered how framing Communion as law and gospel affects the church's perception of inclusivity in the sacrament.

Transubstantiation, the belief that the elements in Communion cease to be bread and wine and become only Jesus' body and blood, became a required doctrine in the Middle Ages. Luther took no issue with the concept of Transubstantiation. Instead, he rejected the requirement for people to agree with the concept to receive it. For Communion to be effective, he taught that it is unnecessary to comprehend how bread and wine are also Jesus' body and blood. God expects communicants to trust his word rather than understand the technicalities. Such trust is not of our own making but provided by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Luther's most vigorous rejection of the church's teaching was of the doctrine of Mass as sacrifice. Though the church never specifically stated that Communion was a re-sacrifice of Jesus, the way worship was curated led many to believe it was. Moreover, the church taught that attending Mass was a good work that produced merits for salvation. In contrast, Luther taught that worship was an act of God and Communion was received passively in faith. Rather than a somber reenactment of Jesus' sacrifice, Luther taught that Communion is a joyful and free gift of God. Participants took their fresh bread home to enjoy.

My wife, a local community college communication professor, was the fourth session's primary instructor. Using research from the interdisciplinary chapter, she taught best communication practices, especially immediacy, when making Communion visits to maximize positive outcomes. The session's goal was to teach the principle of immediacy, the orientation a communicator adopts when using verbal and nonverbal messaging to communicate care and concern so that participants will employ this principle in their visits to communicate care and concern better.

The session began with a short video on empathy. The video, which had no dialogue, showed many people one might encounter daily. As the camera focused on each one, a caption described the hidden realities each person faced. Questions appeared on the screen asking viewers, "If you knew what these people were going through, would you treat them differently?"

Immediacy was defined for participants as "perceived closeness; a sense of oneness between communicators." As immediacy takes verbal and nonverbal forms, these two forms were explored. Verbal immediacy includes using inclusive language,

humor, and personal anecdotes, while nonverbal immediacy includes maintaining eye contact, using appropriate facial expressions, engaging in proximity (physical distance) behaviors, and silence.

To practice verbal immediacy, participants chose partners and reframed five exclusive statements to make them more inclusive. To practice nonverbal immediacy, groups of four were formed, and cards with nonverbal behaviors were distributed to each group. One group member selected a card to read aloud, and the other group members shared a time when the nonverbal behavior impacted them (either positively or negatively). The group repeated these actions until all cards had been read. An acronym, SOLER, was shared with participants to help them recall helpful nonverbal behaviors for Communion visits. SOLER stands for same level, open posture, lean forward, eye contact, and relax.

The session ended with roleplay. My wife and I roleplayed a Communion visit that was done poorly, and two participants roleplayed a Communion visit that was done well. Professional Associate Dr. Rebecca Alt, Assistant Professor of Communication at Lenoir-Rhyne University, consulted on immediacy.

In session five, personal stories were utilized to help stimulate participants' imaginations for possible ways the Spirit may work in Communion. These stories also helped participants connect emotionally with what takes place at Communion. Nearly a year prior to the symposium, members of the Facebook group "Things they didn't teach us in seminary!" were asked, "Do any of you have personal stories of times when giving or receiving Communion became extraordinarily significant to you?" One hundred forty-four group members commented; of those 144, thirteen were invited to join the

symposium via Zoom to share their experiences. Five of those thirteen joined the session to share their stories.

One of the five shared about a time when they received Communion when ravenous, and the tiny portion of bread and sip of wine somehow physically satiated them. Another recalled observing a parishioner with advanced dementia attend worship in a nearly comatose state who became alert and responsive at the Words of Institution. One spoke about a five-year-old girl who transformed her grandparents' understanding of Communion. Her grandparents were staunchly opposed to unconfirmed youth receiving Communion, but her faithful profession, "I want to receive Jesus!" changed their perspective during Communion on Easter. In the context of worship at a men's prison, one clergy serving as celebrant at Communion recalled the verbal exchange of the words of absolution, "In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven," he shared with 50 men in prison fatigues. Coming from those who knew brokenness and forgiveness in such an intimate way, their words still impacted him, even years later. The final guest was a female clergyperson raised in a tradition that did not affirm women in ministry. After 15 years of the Spirit working on her to pursue ordination, she relented and began seminary, which required her family to move to a new town. The first Sunday there, they worshipped at a church with a female pastor and female deacon. When she received Communion from these two ordained women, she was overcome with emotion and had to leave the sanctuary to collect herself in the hallway. The experience gifted her with a new vocational imagination, and two years later, she was ordained in that same congregation.

After hearing from these guest speakers, I shared a few significant personal stories of Communion and allowed participants to share their stories. Participants shared

their Communion stories in table groups of four and were asked to focus specifically on the Holy Spirit's presence at or following Communion. Participants were then invited to share their personal stories of Communion's spiritual significance with the larger group.

The final (sixth) session occurred during a Sunday morning worship service, which included the commissioning of each participant for lay Communion visitation ministry. The commissioning included the entire congregation of Mt. Olive. Holy Communion was offered, and the sermon highlighted teachings from all the other symposium sessions. The readings, prayers, and liturgy were chosen to reinforce how crucial lay Communion visitation is to the life and work of the church. One participant spoke up during announcement time, unbidden, to encourage other congregation members to consider becoming lay Communion visitors and undergo the training they received in the symposium.

Summary of Learning

Pre and Post Symposium Surveys

Participant One noted they felt calmer and less anxious at the second Communion visit than at the first. Their rating of their experience of God during the second visit increased from seven to eight.

Participant Two, while making both visits, noticed God's presence. On the first visit, Participant Two felt God watching over their shoulder in a comforting way. As Participant Two made their second visit, it occurred to them that God is with his people

always, even in adversity. Participant Two rated their experience of God during Communion visits at eight for both visits.

God granted Participant Three a “quieting time” at their first Communion visit to hear God speaking. On the second visit, a sense of peace and calm overcame them. When this happened, they felt an assurance of God’s presence in that moment. They felt they were slowed down to feel God’s presence in the moment. Participant Three rated their experience of God during Communion visits at nine for both visits.

Participant Four experienced God at both visits but did not articulate a difference in the ways they experienced God’s presence between the two visits. The rating of their experience of God at the Communion visits remained at eight for both visits.

Participant Five’s mind was racing with thoughts, especially regarding logistics, at the first Communion visit. Therefore, they were unaware of God’s work in and through them at the visit. However, on the second visit, God opened their eyes to sense the awe of the communicant, and they were touched by witnessing the communicant’s reverent gratitude for Communion. Participant Five's rating of their experience of God during Communion visits doubled, increasing from four on the first visit to eight on the second.

Participant Six noted they felt God’s presence at both Communion visits but noticed God calming them at their second visit. Participant Six’s rating of their experience of God during the Communion visits increased slightly from eight on the first visit to nine on the second.

Participant Seven experienced God intensely at both visits but did not articulate a difference in their spiritual experience of the two visits. Participant Seven rated their experience of God during the Communion visits at ten for both visits.

Participant Eight did not articulate a difference in the spiritual experience of the two visits. Participant Eight rated their experience of God during the Communion visits at six for both visits.

The average spiritual experience rating for visit one was 7.5, and the average rating for visit two was 8.25, which indicates a modest increase in spiritual experience between the two visits. Notably, no participants reported decreased spiritual experience between the two visits.

One-on-One Interviews

Participant One said they felt calmer and at ease at the second Communion visit because they were “better educated” after the symposium. They learned in the symposium that “no matter how clumsy we were it still worked, and [Communion] was what [the communicant] needed. It felt like we were bringing the church to that person.” Some change was noted by Participant One: “I am now looking at things a little bit differently because of [the symposium].” While they recognized God’s presence at both visits, the significant change they experienced was that the symposium greatly enhanced their appreciation for Communion in worship. This appreciation includes a new understanding that no portion of worship is more critical than Communion.

Participant Two was very nervous at the first Communion visit, but while there began to feel like God was “looking over my shoulder” and saying, “Everything’s OK. You’ll get through this. You know you’ll do what you need to do, and [the communicant] will be happy about it.” On the second visit, they felt less nervous, and God told them, “You can do this real well this time.” Similar to Participant One, their appreciation for

Communion increased. “I have seen that Communion is a special thing for people,” said Participant Two. They shared that they had previously thought of Communion as just a “process of the service,” but after the symposium and visits, now “it feels very special...not just an ordinary thing to do.” It even occurred to Participant Two that “maybe in 5-10 years, I’m gonna be in that situation, and I’m going to be thankful for somebody bringing Communion [to me].” Participant Two better understood what Communion is and what it does. They articulated a connection between Communion and God’s word, both spoken and in the person of Jesus.

Participant Three remarked on the newfound feeling of holiness around the act of Communion after the symposium. They also began conceiving of Communion as a joyful gift. Mt. Olive’s mission statement includes the phrase “God’s work. Our hands.” Participant Three discovered a new connection between the congregation’s mission and Communion visits. They stated, “We’re taking in his body and blood. The whole concept of that becomes really true as you give Communion.” Continuing their thought, they added, “In doing Communion with folks, you also feel closer to God as you’re doing that because you are taking in his body, and he’s in you so that you can spread the love and joy to others. It just fills you up.”

Participant Four focused on “doing it right” at the first Communion visit. On the second visit, they sensed a hunger in the communicant for Communion. Also, at the second visit, Participant Four recalled, “I felt God was definitely with us in the room and guiding us during the service.” Since the symposium, it occurred to Participant Four “how much I had missed taking Communion to the homebound.” They noted they are “more aware of the privilege [of] being able to take Communion and worship.” Like

Participants One and Two, Participant Four received a greater appreciation of Communion from the symposium, noting especially the ability of Communion to transcend time and space.

After the symposium, Participant Five expressed that they were seeing “so much more in Communion.” Communion had been an empty ritual to them, but that has changed. Participant Five described listening to a sermon after the symposium and identifying connections between the sermon's points and Communion. They quoted the sermon and how it connected with Communion because they began to see that Communion represents Christians as much as it does Christ. “In Communion, he breaks us, blesses us, and gives us to be shared with the world.” Notably, this connection was not taught at the symposium, indicating theological creativity resulting from participation. Participant Five has begun to wonder about the people they encounter daily. “What if they would like Communion?” they now regularly ask themselves. They reported “seeing opportunities everywhere.” Receiving Communion has also become more critical to Participant Five. Their pastor was away on the morning of the interview, and worship excluded Communion. This would not have bothered them before the symposium, but now it does. After the symposium, Participant Five reported, “I was more in tune with the [communicant’s] response of how deeply significant [Communion] was to her. I understood that God was really touching her heart.” Communion visits have become more emotional to Participant Five after the symposium, especially when speaking the Words of Institution.

Participant Six was more “nervous” and “apprehensive” at the first Communion visit but “was completely comfortable the entire time” of the second visit. Participant Six

reported a greater sense of responsibility for taking Communion to the homebound after the symposium. They also reported that they can better perceive “the importance of [Communion visits] and how much it means to [the homebound]. After the symposium, Participant Six “realized the Holy Spirit is present during [Communion] visits and nothing will go wrong [in them] that can’t be fixed.” The symposium reassured Participant Six that “God had his hand on [Communion visits].” They stated, “I felt more of a presence of God [at Communion visits after understanding the significance of Holy Communion].”

Participant Seven described their feelings at the first Communion visit as being “scared in the beginning, but his calming presence took over.” After the symposium, their confidence in performing lay Communion visitation significantly increased. “I know I can do this now,” they reported. They believe, “I don’t think [the symposium] has changed my experience of God.”

Participant Eight felt God’s presence and was calm at both visits. However, the symposium made a significant impact on them. They described the impact, saying, “It changed my whole attitude about being a part of giving Communion. I feel capable. I heard God talking through [the symposium] because if we make a mistake, God is there and will make it OK.” The symposium gave Participant Eight an emotional connection with how Communion transcends time and space and brings today’s Christians together with all Christians of the past.

Journals

Participant One developed a new understanding of Communion visits as bringing the “church body” and Christ’s gift of his body and blood. Understanding the significance of Communion caused Participant One to feel “humbled to be able to bring [Communion] to [the homebound].” Their appreciation for Communion in worship significantly increased.¹

Participant Two noted that during Communion visits, the symposium enabled them to be calm and attentive. In addition to a better perception of “God’s power in Communion,” Participant Two better observed the power of the Spirit that Communion gave to the communicant. They wrote that the symposium “gave me more feeling of God’s Spirit in the giving of Communion.”

Participant Three felt “blessed” and “fulfilled” at the Communion visit following the symposium. The communicant had previously supported Participant Three during a particularly challenging time, which gave the participant a positive feeling of “giving back.”

Participant Four felt God’s presence on both visits but recognized a hunger for Communion from the communicant on the second visit. The participant understood the Communion visit as God’s work through them.

“I believe God touched the heart of [the communicant],” wrote Participant Five. This participant felt God leading them to share information about the person they visited with their pastor. They also believed God would make time for them to make more

¹ Circumstances determined that participants one and four helped distribute bread at Communion during Sunday worship two weeks after the symposium. For context, lay persons usually only distribute wine. Both participants felt honored and articulated gratitude and awe for being able to serve in this way.

Communion visits. Participant Five wrote, “The symposium helped alert me to hear messages about God’s power in Communion when I listen to sermons and read books.” They gave specific examples of their newfound alertness to these messages. “The symposium continues opening my eyes and ears and spirit to God’s power in many and various ways.” Participant Five reported, as did other participants, that they experienced an enhanced appreciation of Communion in worship. The symposium deepened Participant Five’s compassion, “I’ve started wondering about friends, neighbors, and family members who might benefit from a Communion visit.” They expressed gratitude for the privilege of making “sacred” Communion visits.

Participant Six experienced a moment during the second Communion visit when the cup of wine nearly spilled and wondered if God had held it steady. They also gained a new sense of the sufficiency of Communion, having previously felt that they should visit for a significant amount of time to minister truly.

Participant Seven believes God was with them during the Communion visits and that the Holy Spirit guided them through the service and conversation. They sensed a craving in the communicant for something they lacked, even though all their needs appeared to be met.

Although they did not know one another, Participant Eight felt a greater connection with the communicant at the second Communion visit than in an ordinary encounter. The symposium gave Participant Eight confidence that God was with them and would enable them to minister effectively in Communion visits. Despite their timidity that they possibly were not up for the task, Participant Eight gained complete confidence in their ability to be a home Communion visitor.

Focus Group Discussion

Participant Four shared that they constantly get a lot out of making Communion visits. However, they recognized the eagerness of the communicant to receive Communion at the second visit. Participant Five had a similar experience and described feeling “overwhelmed” to witness how much the Communion visit meant to the communicant. Participant Three shared that they felt more comfortable with the Communion visit after the symposium, which allowed them to be more aware and sense God’s presence during the visit. Participant Four recognized God’s presence at both visits but shared that they could “feel God’s presence” at the second one because of the positive response of the communicant. Participant Seven shared her experience at the visits:

I think the Holy Spirit has a lot to do with it and in bringing everything together – your calmness, their calmness, and their reactions to what you do and their reactions to everything that you do. You may not do the same thing with each person because each person is not the same as the one before. So, you have to go along with that person. I just think the Holy Spirit guides you into that.

Participant Five agreed with this statement.

Participant Two shared that the communicant at the second visit participated in online worship regularly, and having Communion brought to them appeared to “complete” their worship experience. Participant One shared that they believed the symposium made some difference in their spiritual experience of making Communion visits because of their increased confidence in the task. The participants agreed unanimously that the symposium enhanced their experience of receiving Communion during worship.

Conclusions

This project hypothesizes that if lay Communion visitors participate in a symposium to learn the significance of Communion, then they will be positioned better to experience the Spirit work during Communion visits. The data collected indicates that the hypothesis is true. Knowing Communion's significance enhances lay Communion visitors' spiritual experience as they visit. The problem identified in this project was that lay Communion visitors did not understand the significance of Holy Communion and felt no urgency to perform this ministry. Following the symposium, in which they thoroughly explored the significance of Communion, they all reported or displayed a renewed sense of urgency for making Communion visits.

An experience of the Holy Spirit is difficult to identify. However, indicators of the movement of the Spirit are many and varied in the biblical texts, in creedal and confessional writings, and in the works of influential theologians. The most prevalent sign of the Spirit's work is life. Questioning whether the Spirit is at work is the same as asking, "Is life being given, improved, or sustained?" If the answer is yes to any of these questions, the Spirit is at work. The answer is unequivocally yes; a new sense of life is being observed in Communion visits, according to the participants of this project. The Spirit gave them life and gave life to those they visited.

All participants were between 65 and 75 when time is at a premium. All participants are acutely aware that they have lived more days than they have available for the future. Their time is precious, yet serving as Communion visitors makes it more precious. The words they used to describe the ability for them to make Communion visits were "humbled," "privileged," "blessed," and "fulfilled."

The participants witnessed the Spirit working life in the people they communed. All of them were warmly welcomed by those they communed. Beyond being welcomed, several participants recognized a “hunger” for Communion in those they visited. Several reported being inspired and even overwhelmed by the response of the communicant. The participants’ recognition of the feelings of the communicants suggests a greater level of compassion given to them by the Spirit. One participant’s compassion increased to the point that they began wondering about the need for Communion in all the people they encountered daily.

Another way the Holy Spirit worked life through this project is that the Spirit breathed new life into a dying ministry. Since the symposium, there has been an observable eagerness to make Communion visits. That eagerness has not abated at this writing, four months after the symposium. Before the symposium, the dilemma was finding ways of encouraging lay Communion visitors to visit. Now, the dilemma is making time to coordinate the visits they initiate.

Another primary task of the Holy Spirit is the work of sanctification, making holy or forgiving sin. The Holy Spirit was certainly at work in this way through the symposium. All participants reported a newfound sense that they could not “mess up” Communion visits. They articulated that whatever they did at visits, the Spirit would work and make their visit effective. In other words, they began to trust that God works in and through their brokenness at their visits.

Although the data indicates the project’s hypothesis is correct, it is preferred that the effects of the symposium on participants were more pronounced than reported. For example, the participants’ ratings of their spiritual experience increased from 7.5 to 8.25

following the symposium. This increase is admittedly modest. The study participants may not have much practice discussing personal spiritual experiences. Getting participants to identify God's work in the Communion visit was difficult, but they could easily talk about what they or the communicant did. It would be interesting to try this experiment with a group of Christians from another denomination to see what differences might be observed in the articulation of their experience.

For future studies, one symposium result was ubiquitous among the participants. All participants indicated that the symposium strongly enhanced their own experience of receiving Communion. A strong correlation naturally developed between understanding the significance of Holy Communion and appreciation for receiving it. Most participants had been taught Communion's significance as adolescents during confirmation. The participants appreciated the symposium and acknowledged a newfound understanding of Communion's significance. Therefore, another interesting future study would be the spiritual impact of experiential Communion instruction on adults.

APPENDIX A
INITIAL PROJECT INVITE

May 30, 2023

Dear Project Participant,

I look forward to having you as a participant in my Doctor of Ministry project. Your participation will teach you the deeper significance of Holy Communion and empower you to serve God and your church by making Communion visits to sick and shut-in members. You are also gifting God's church with helpful data based on your experience. Your participation requires:

- Complete a criminal background check through Safe Gatherings at no cost to you. An email with instructions will be sent to you.
- Completion of the enclosed United Theological Seminary Informed Consent Form.
- Optional: shadow me on a Communion visit at 11 a.m. July 6 at Trinity Village (Springs Rd.), or 4 p.m. July 9 at Trinity Ridge (Mountain View).
- Attendance at one 90-minute training retreat at Mt. Olive on Sunday, July 16, from 6-7:30 p.m. where you will learn how to make Communion visits competently. You will receive a simple Communion liturgy, Communion kits, and pre and post-visit prayers.
- Two Communion visits (independently or in pairs) to shut-in members of your congregation. The first visit will take place the week prior (week of July 16) to the symposium, and the second visit the week following (week of July 30). Your pastor will assign your visit.
- Attendance at five 90-minute evening symposium sessions (July 23-27) where you will learn the Biblical, historical, and theological basis of Holy Communion. You will also learn the best practices of Communion visitation using effective strategies from the field of Interpersonal Communication.
- Attendance at worship on July 30 (at your congregation) where you will be commissioned for service as a lay Communion visitor.
- Completion of eight guided journal entries.
- Participation at one one-on-one interview with me (afternoon or evening of August 6 or 13) about your experience and one one-hour focus group discussion on August 20 at 6 p.m.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can end your participation at any time and for any reason. There are minimal expected health risks of participating, however there are some increased risks of virus exposure from meeting in a group and at congregational living settings. Please contact me to arrange alternatives if you have conflicts with any of the above dates and/or times.

Please contact me at rray1@united.edu with any questions.

Thank you,

The Reverend Ryan Ray

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

United Theological Seminary
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigator Name: Ryan Ray

Contact Information: r-ray1@united.edu, 828-310-0776

Introduction: I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary.

Purpose: I am researching the effects of knowing the significance of Holy Communion on lay eucharistic visitation ministers.

Requirements for Participation: You are invited because you have discerned, or are discerning, the Spirit's call to lay Communion visitation ministry.

Procedures:

Suppose you agree to be in the study. In that case, you will be asked to: submit to a background check, attend a 90-minute Communion visitor training retreat in Mt. Olive's fellowship hall, make two Communion visits to a shut-in church member, attend five 90-minute class sessions on the significance of Communion in Mt. Olive's fellowship hall, attend one 60-90-minute worship service with Commissioning in Mt. Olive's (or your church's) sanctuary, write at least one guided-journal entry per week for six weeks, complete pre and post-symposium surveys, submit to one 30-minute interview in Mt. Olive's Martin Luther Room, and one 60-minute focus-group discussion in Mt. Olive's fellowship hall.

Human Subject participation:

All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study.

Risks:

There is a risk of contracting viruses such as Covid-19 when visiting congregate living settings such as assisted living facilities.

Benefits:

This project will benefit the church by increasing the number of members engaged in pastoral care and providing data on how understanding significance impacts experience. In addition, participants will benefit by learning new skills and growing in faith.

Voluntariness:

Participation is voluntary, and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. If something makes you feel uncomfortable while you are in the study, please contact me directly in person, on the phone, or in electronic communication. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

Confidentiality:

We will be careful to keep your information confidential and ask you and all the focus group members to keep the discussion confidential. However, there is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. The files will be encrypted and password protected. You can decide whether you want your name used.

Summary:

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me.

Signature:

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you and want to be in the study. Do not sign the paper if you do not want to be in the study. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study, why it is being done, and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to
Participate in the Project/Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX C

PRE AND POST-SYMPOSIUM SURVEY

Pre and Post-Symposium Survey

Did you sense God doing anything to you during the Communion visit? If so, what did you sense God doing to you?

If you found a part of the Communion visit most spiritually powerful, what was it and why?

On a scale of one to ten, with one indicating the least you have ever experienced and ten indicating the most you have ever experienced, how would you rate your experience of God during the Communion visit?

APPENDIX D
JOURNAL QUESTIONS

Journal Questions (1-5 educational, 6-8 evaluative)

1. Based on the scriptures we read in our first session, what do you think Jesus wants to achieve through Communion?
2. In today's session (session two), we learned about how Communion was implemented before the Reformation. What did the church's implementation of Communion communicate about God to the people?
3. Martin Luther taught that God offers forgiveness, life, and salvation through Communion. How have you experienced those things through Communion?
4. Beyond what God is doing through the consecrated bread and wine, God is working in and through those who offer Communion. How might God work through those who give (or take) Communion to others?
5. You have been called and commissioned to extend God's love and grace through Communion visits. That is undoubtedly a great honor! What do you feel is your responsibility as you perform this divine task?
6. Describe what you believe God did during your last Communion visit.
7. How did the symposium help you experience God's power as you make Communion visits?
8. Read back over all your journal entries. How have your thoughts and feelings about Communion visits changed over the course of this project?

APPENDIX E

ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

One-on-One Interviews

1. Describe the difference in the ways you felt God's presence during both Communion visits.

2. How has God changed you since the second Communion visit?

3. How did understanding the significance of Holy Communion change your experience of God at your second Communion visit?

APPENDIX F
FOCUSED GROUP DISCUSSION

Focus-Group Discussion

1. In your opinion, did you or the person you visited receive more from God at your first Communion visit, and why?

2. In your opinion, did you or the person you visited receive more from God at your second Communion visit, and why?

3. How did your experience of God change between the two visits? Note changes in confidence, competence, awareness, etc.

4. My hypothesis is if lay Communion visitors understand the significance of Holy Communion, then they will better position themselves to experience the Holy Spirit as they make Communion visits. Do you agree?

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